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War Stories Performed at Kasser Theater

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Actors and playwrights, Anthony Curry and Carrie Gibson, came to the Alexander Kasser Theater at Montclair State University to perform their play *Into The Fire* on Feb. 5. It is a powerful and emotional play based on the post-war lives of veterans from every war.

As the two of them perform their series of monologues taken word for word from interviews with real veterans, the entire audience was put in a trance-like state watching this one of a kind performance. The entire play consisted completely of interviews that the writers/actors conducted themselves of dozens of veterans of every age.

Before the play began, the President of Montclair State University, Dr. Susan A. Cole, came out to speak about the importance of programs like this. She also introduced Senate Majority Leader Barbara Buono, who also came on stage to say a few words.

Shortly after, the actors approached the stage. Curry and Gibson gave a short disclaimer about the emotions people may feel while watching the

play, and they were right to warn everyone.

From the first minute, they began an intense back and forth succession of lines which at first do not seem to connect. Throughout the next 45 minutes, those familiar lines are revealed to be some of the more memorable parts of the most emotional scenes mentioned in the beginning as a type of foreshadowing. Many of the scenes show one actor being a veteran, speaking as if the audience is interviewing them, with the other actor playing multiple roles of spouses, siblings, children, co-workers and so on.

One scene shows Curry as a Vietnam veteran who lost an arm in the Battle for Hamburger Hill, with Gibson as his wife. This is surprisingly dynamic. As you are drawn in by their touching stories, it becomes easy to forget that these two people on stage are really just the same two actors that have been there all along, which works to their advantage.

Mixed in through these first hand accounts of post-traumatic stress, physical handicaps and loss of every kind, the actors stand together and list quotes from a website that is meant to help people cope with post-traumatic stress. A section of this site displays "Military Humor," and they quote lines, that at first will make you chuckle. However once it sinks in, you realize there is a true disconnect between these veterans and the bulk of society.

The clear message portrayed by this play is that for the most part these veterans just want to be understood and accepted. Some of them may have panic attacks or sudden flash backs, but they sacrificed themselves for their country.

Now that they are back, they sometimes feel used and unappreciated. This play was not a political or anti-war message by any means; they sought to inform people about the hardships our returning heroes face in a culture that, at the moment, does not know how to handle it. As they describe it, it is less of a political issue and more of a human issue. Once the play ended, they opened the floor for an open conversation with the audience. The room full of veterans, students, faculty and even a few out-of-towners

roared to life to share their appreciation for the actors' performance, mission and commitment, as well as voice their opinions on the subject. The play was fantastic, as were the actors' performances. Although the skill of the actors might have been dwarfed by their message and the power of the subject, it was in no way overlooked.

Into The Fire is not only an entertaining piece that will captivate anyone who is lucky enough to see it, but the message they represent is universal and effects us all.

Next time Curry and Gibson come to town, it is definitely worth the trip to the theater, you will not regret it.