

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXXI, Number 43, 3 April 1997 — Barnard play teaches about AIDS struggles [ARTICLE]

## Barnard play teaches about AIDS struggles

By **SUSAN FREEMAN**  
*Spectator Staff Writer*

*Still Life with AIDS*, a production created by an advanced-acting class at Barnard last spring, has become a teaching tool as the Barnard women involved are now touring local high schools with their performance.

In creating the screenplay for the production, the Barnard students, under guidance from Professor of Theater Denny Partridge and Theater Manager Kat Kavanagh, interviewed women from a support group for professional women with AIDS founded by Kavanagh's mother.

"There are too many women who are dying of this disease. It's really something that can be prevented," Kavanagh said. She added that she has been personally involved with many of these women since her mother founded the support group.

The group also researched the virus through books and case studies. According to Kavanagh, in doing the research, they noticed that women were usually left out of the testing.

"The first feeling we all had was really intense anger. It's starting to improve, but the underlying message really was that women don't matter. We wanted to create something in response to that," Kavanagh said.

According to Kavanagh, at least 90 percent of the lines in the play

were taken directly from interviews with women from the actual support group.

Partridge said most of the other lines were written by the students who, over Spring Break last year, wrote their own narratives about what would happen if they got AIDS right now, using the circumstances of their present lives.

"Meeting the women was totally unique. There were six women, all different ages, religions, and races. Then they all have this thing bearing down on them," cast-member Courtney Greene, BC '99, said.

The 35-minute play focuses on and centers around seven professional women from a variety of backgrounds who come together in a support group to help each other deal with AIDS. The story follows the women over the course of five years, over which time one of the women decides to have a baby who is born HIV-negative, several members of the group die, and the group disbands.

Many of the students involved in the production said the experience has been intense and has affected them in their daily lives.

"For a while, I went around thinking I had AIDS. But this thing is about living with AIDS. I thought it would be about dying," cast member Cassie McLean, BC '99, said.

The fact that at least three of the

women interviewed for the piece graduated from Columbia or Barnard also made the experience more personal for the cast, Kavanagh said.

“To be told that you are responsible for your life by people who were here—they’re telling us about the most personal parts of their lives—their sex life—affects you a lot more than if it was your parents telling you,” Celeste Guzman, BC '97, said.

Dean of Barnard College Dorothy Denburg said that she and members of the theater department decided to recreate the play for another run this spring.

“I thought it was extremely powerful and moving and said a lot about what it is to be a woman who is HIV-positive. I thought it was worth sharing with younger people,” Denburg said.

Denburg added that she felt so strongly about bringing the production to area high schools that the first school Barnard booked to show the performance is the school where Denburg’s daughter is a student.

Yesterday morning’s production at Stuyvesant High School in Lower Manhattan was the first in a series of performances this spring: eight will be at area high schools and two will be held at Barnard later this month.

Partridge said that students at Stuyvesant reacted positively to the show.

“They were so attentive. You could hear a pin drop,” Partridge said, adding that the group will be at the school again this morning to present the play to another audience of about 850 students.

The group will hold a free performance at 9 p.m. April 13 in Barnard’s Minor Latham Playhouse in Milbank Hall.