

COVENTRY



Photos by Kendra Lolio

Pictured in the Coventry High School production of 'The Insanity of Mary Girard' are Delaney Ryan (center) as Mary Girard, surrounded by The Furies: Marcus Evans, Alaina Furtado, Joseph Rollan, Sienna McCulley, Jacob Card, Tyler Alexander, Alexis Cole and Sadie Till.

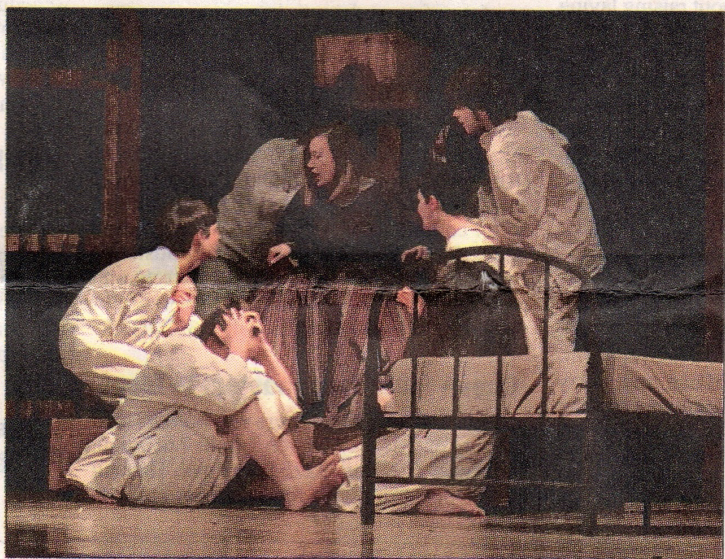
High drama

Theater students perform 'The Insanity of Mary Girard'

By **KENDRA LOLIO**
klolio@ricentral.com

COVENTRY — In stark contrast to their previous musical production "Avenue Q," the students at Coventry High School will take the stage this week with a new, much darker and more mature production called "The Insanity of Mary Girard" by Lanie Robertson. The piece will also be their entry into the Rhode Island High School Drama Festival which takes place this weekend.

The short, 60-minute production set in 1790 is based on the true story of Mary Girard, played by Delaney Ryan. Girard is a young woman whose husband, Stephen, played by Leo Moore, places her in a mental asylum which is located in the basement of the Pennsylvania Hospital in



Mary Girard (played by Delaney Ryan) sits surrounded by The Furies in the Coventry High production of 'The Insanity of Mary Girard.'

See **DRAMA**, page A3

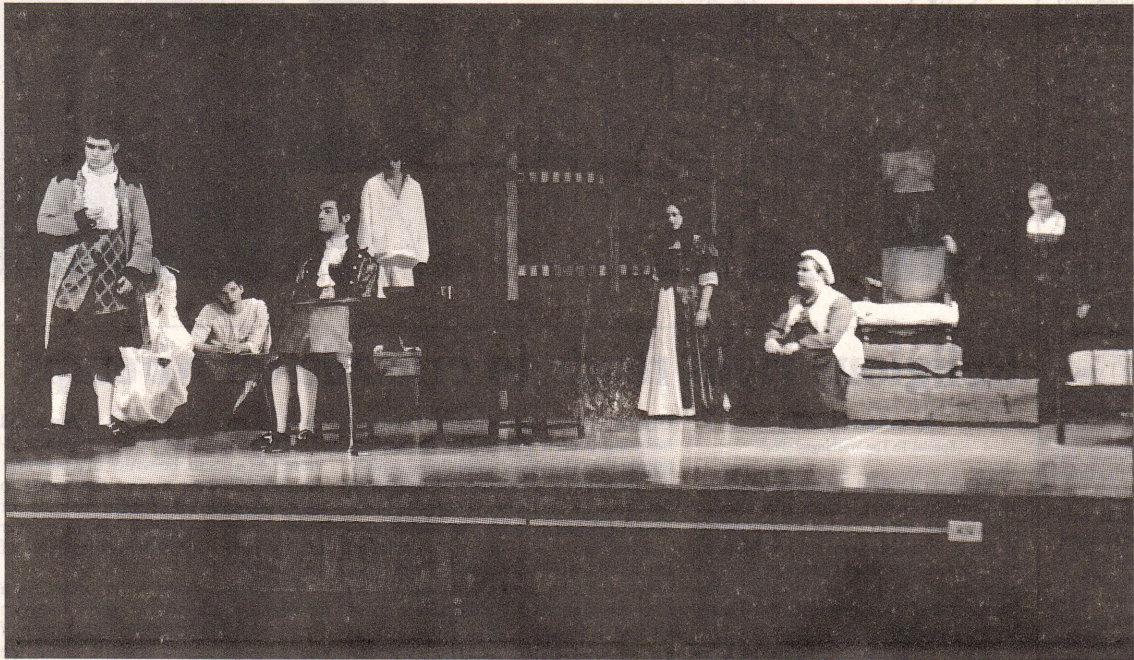


Photo by Kendra Lolio

The cast rehearses in the Coventry High School production of 'The Insanity of Mary Girard.'

Drama

Continued from page A1

Philadelphia. Her husband has paid off the owner of the hospital, Mr. Phillips, played by Kyle Dante, in return for her being kept at the facility permanently.

During her time in the ward she is kept in a "tranquilizer chair," which is very much a focal point of the show's set placed at center stage throughout the production. The device was commonly used to "tranquilize" mental health patients, particularly through the use of a box attached at the back of the chair that could be raised or lowered to cover the individual's eyes and ears, leaving them only a small space for their nose to breathe. It was not uncommon for patients to be left for days in the device.

Girard has been in the chair for the entire day when the show opens. She begins to hallucinate that the other patients in the ward are her emotions and feelings, otherwise known as "The Furies." The idea is similar to the Disney film "Inside Out," which personifies the main character's inner feelings such as joy, fear and disgust. The Furies are played by Marcus Evans, Alaina Furtado, Joseph Rollan, Sienna McCulley, Jacob Card, Tyler Alexander, Alexis Cole and Sadie Till.

"It is an extremely dark piece," said Director Michael Wilkinson, who has been directing shows at CHS for nearly 20 years. "And it doesn't end well."

Wilkinson said the piece has a strong "feminist" tone to it which he found particularly timely given the political climate of the country at present.

"I liked the message of it more than anything else," he said. "It's just part of this history of women being oppressed in this country. It continues to this day with women not earning the same amount of money. There is still inequality within our history to this day. It's about dealing with people that are trying to search for equality."

Ryan, who has taken on her first-ever lead role as Mary Girard, said that although her character was an insane asylum she could still relate to her on a very basic level.

"She feels hopeless at times which everyone understands," Ryan said. "There's definitely been times where she doesn't feel hopeless and feels incredibly excited about

something and I can relate to that, too. There are a lot of parallels to today but it's not a happy show. It's very dark."

Ryan said that the 18th century language was also difficult to learn.

"There were definitely some phrases I don't find myself using on a daily basis," she said. "But if anything it's taught me how to articulate better because they were very big on that."

Ryan said that her character is always stuck in a battle of resistance, and the concept of the powerful versus the powerless is a recurring theme throughout the story.

"A lot of times people feel that their voices aren't being heard and they feel powerless," Ryan said. "And what I love about the struggle of Mary Girard is even though it is just that, a struggle, she forces herself to be heard. She has this progressive courageousness and she will stop at nothing to be heard. It shows that even the powerless, the people who are silenced by someone with money, they can still fight to be heard."

Alexis Cole, who plays one of The Furies, said that the show focuses heavily on injustice toward women and highlights the ways in which society has lacked in progression toward equality.

"Although we've come extremely far from this, in the current political climate you can definitely see that we are taking steps back," she said. "I think a big reason for us doing this show is that it makes a statement about where we are as a country right now."

Hannah Lanoue plays Polly Kenton, Stephen Girard's new mistress. She said it was difficult to relate to the character who is not necessarily supposed to be revered positively to the audience.

"It was hard for me to relate because my character is kind of promiscuous," she explained. "She's very self-focused and always trying to show her superiority over Mary. It was hard to get into her state of mind and into her head."

Dante, who plays the corruptible Mr. Phillips, said he appreciated the challenge of his role.

"My character starts off very innocent, but in the second scene he becomes more deceitful and corrupt," said Dante. "It really fascinates me because I've had my own struggles with who I want to be. It allows me to reflect and at the same time it's fun to experiment and go further past my comfort zone."

"Relating to my character is so difficult because he's such a jerk," said Moore, who plays Stephen Girard. "He thinks he's better than everyone and anything he wants to happen will happen. He's also extremely high class society and that's not necessarily me."

Marcus Evans, who plays one of The Furies, said as an actor he appreciated the chance to play a character with a mental illness.

"Playing someone who suffers in their mental state is very freeing," he said. "As you start to articulate the motions of a person who was afflicted with mental illness, you start to see things you never noticed about yourself."

"I thought there was a strong takeaway in how we've changed and how far we can still go," said Jacob Card, who also plays one of The Furies.

Wilkinson said he hopes the show serves as a learning experience not only for the cast but for the show-goers as well, the idea of resisting one's circumstances.

"Without question we have all been Mary's in our own lives," he said.

Other notable roles include Remy Thibeault as The Warder, Sabrina Peltier as Mrs. Lum and Sarah Bassett as Mrs. Hatcher. Students members of the production crew include Stage Manager Devlin Cook Hines, Assistant Stage Managers Caleb Robitaille and Ray Thibeault, Light Operator Hannah Booth and Sound Operator Morgan Carr. Abigail Madeiros was in charge of make up and costumes with the assistance of former CHS student John Palmer.

The Rhode Island High School Drama Festival will take place this weekend at Cranston High School West. The CHS Drama Department will be performing on Saturday. If they are successful in the state round they will go to the New England Drama Festival which is a 3-day trip. The CHS Drama Department has previously performed in Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire and Connecticut as part of the competition.

"The Insanity of Mary Girard" will be playing in the Coventry High School Auditorium from Tuesday, March 7 through Thursday, March 9 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets will be available at the door for \$10.

Follow Kendra Lolio on Twitter @kendralolio