

The extremes

BY MICHAEL GILTZ

Extremities, the latest production of the Florida Players, premiered last night at the Constans Theater. It's a controversial and powerful story that poses tough questions to the audience and demands a heavy emotional commitment from the actors.

In the play, Marjorie (Karen Hinton) is home alone when a stranger (Raul, played by Manny Suarez) bursts into the house and asks for Joe. Confused and disturbed, Marjorie tells him that no one named Joe lives in the house and asks him to leave.

The stranger persists and his actions become more threatening. Marjorie makes a vain attempt to convince him that her husband is sleeping upstairs, but he sees through her ruse.

Our worst fears are quickly confirmed as the play's first act turns into a violent and painful struggle between the two protagonists. Raul's rape attempt is harsh and compelling: At one point he forces Marjorie to repeat over and over that she loves him. He becomes lost in his private fantasy, almost vulnerable, but when she doesn't say and do exactly what he wants, Raul explodes in anger.

Luckily, Marjorie manages to keep her wits about her and fights back. She disables him and ties him up. But when Marjorie becomes convinced that justice will not be served (Raul never actually raped her), she decides to kill him rather than call the police. Thus the stage is set for a confrontation between Marjorie and her roommates, whom she tries to persuade to lend their support.

If the judicial system is ineffective, do we have the right to take the law into our own hands? Why do criminals always seem to have more rights than victims? Is a rapist someone to be despised and treated like an "animal," as Marjorie insists on referring to Raul, or is he someone to be pitied and helped? These are the fascinating questions posed by *Extremities*, and they weigh most heavily on Karen Hinton and Manny Suarez, the lead actors.

Karen has little trouble relating to her character, Marjorie, for she's had the painful personal experience of knowing a



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Raul, played by Manny Suarez, attacks Marjorie, played by Karen Hinton, in *Extremities*

friend who was raped and, much to Karen's frustration, chose not to report it to the police.

More importantly, as a woman she is aware of the constant possibility of rape. The "Walk With A Friend" signs scattered throughout campus are a most obvious symbol.

"Women all over, but especially on this campus, always have to be aware of the threat of rape," she said. "If you walk somewhere alone at night, that's always in the back of your mind and it's just not fair."

Manny's understanding of his character has come with a little more difficulty, for the emotions Raul expresses are not ones most men are used to experiencing or dealing with. Manny quickly admits that the experience is emotionally draining. "Sometimes after rehearsal I'll have tremendous headaches and I just want to be alone."

Karen also has had her problems, including recurring nightmares. But the entire cast knew each other before rehearsals began, and their casual friendships helped create a relaxed atmosphere in which the inevitable tensions that such a production creates could be more easily dealt with.

Trust between Karen and Manny is especially important, for

of Extremities

they have many technically difficult scenes together. Each actor must be completely confident about what the other is going to do if they are to go beyond the technical difficulties posed by the violence and create convincing portrayals.

Both actors already have numerous scratches and bruises from rehearsals, and the actual performances are certain to be even more intense. Nonetheless, Manny notes that they have an "unspoken agreement" about how far they are willing to go to create a sense of realism.

However, he adds that sometimes it gets so intense he feels as if he is looking at Marjorie instead of Karen. This can complicate matters, especially in the scene where Raul is slapped by Marjorie.

"I have to steel myself and stare straight ahead, because I know she's going to hit me. Now if Karen hits me, I'll be all right. But if Marjorie hits me," he said, laughing, "I'm dead."

From Marjorie's point of view, *Extremities* is about a rape and how one woman deals with it. But even if we can't condone her actions, no one has any problems in sympathizing with the victim.

From Raul's point of view, the play is about how he becomes human again, and this may be what makes *Extremities* so disturbing and controversial. Not only are we asked to empathize with a rape victim (which is relatively easy) but, ultimately, we must also sympathize and feel for the rapist. We are asked to understand that even someone who commits the vilest act is, at heart, a human being and needs to be helped, not hurt.

Nonetheless, we can't help feeling more for the victim than the attacker. Karen sets it all into an uneasy perspective by relating an unusual incident that occurred recently.

"I was walking by this construction site," she said, "when the workers began to make some comments. I ignored them but then it suddenly hit me: This is what happened to Marjorie, and she ignored them and look what happened. I stiffened and I didn't know what to do but I just kept walking and I made it to my room and I locked the door." She smiles as if to make light of the incident, but then adds, "It was scary."