

The Rebel Yell

Arts & Entertainment

Feminists educate, throw bananas

By [Aisha O'Brien](#), Contributing Writer
Published on [February 25, 2008](#)

“Have a banana!”

Yellow bananas proceeded to hale over the audience. Two members screamed and laughed in hysterics as one potassium-rich grenade hit a chair near them in a reverberating thump. Three gorilla-masked women ran up and down the aisles of the Student Union Theatre, hurling one banana after another.

This was the Guerrilla Girls On Tour experience.

The Women’s Center and the Nevada Coalition Against Sexual Violence, with the help of sponsors such as the National Organization of Women, The Rape Crisis Center and Sin City Sisters brought the Guerrilla Girls to UNLV.

They set out in 2001 to change the world, “one sexist city at a time.” Last week was Las Vegas’ turn. On Feb. 13 and 14, the university played host to these masked activist primates who offered a workshop and play.

Feb. 14 – “Silence Is Violence”

Guerrilla members, taking on the personas of dead female artists Aphra Behn, Anne Sexton, Francis Harper and Edith Evans, gave brief introductions of who they were.

Behn (1640-89) introduced herself as the first professional female English author. She was a spy in the Dutch Wars (1665-67) and adopted the pseudonym Astrea. Her humor was “broad” and “bawdy,” not safe and lady-like.

Sexton (1928-74) was a writer and “brought topics such as menstruation, abortion, drug addiction, postpartum depression and mental breakdowns out of June Cleaver’s kitchen and onto the dinner table of American literature.” Sexton won the Pulitzer Prize for Literature after only writing for 10 years.

Harper (1825-1911) was a member of the American Anti-Slavery Society. In 1852, she became the first black woman to publish a novel, titled, “Iola Leroy.” The novel centers around a rescued black slave and the Reconstructed South.

Evans (1888-1976) was one of the greatest actors on the English stage in the 20th century. Eventually, she made a transition to the screen, “after generally ignoring the medium for the first two decades of talking films.” It was her performance as Miss Western in Tony Richardson’s Oscar-winning Best Picture “Tom Jones” that established her as a major film star.

What followed was a hilarious foray into Women’s Studies 101.

Talking about issues such as gay marriage, sexism in politics and the lack of women on Broadway, the Girls flashed posters of campaigns past.

“Oh! The Joys of Being a Woman Playwright!” came at the discussion on the dearth of women writers, producers and musicians on Broadway. One joy was, “You save money! You don’t have to buy evening gowns for all those award ceremonies!”

In the middle of the play, the Girls depicted Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman to be elected to Congress, Betty Friedan, author of “The Feminine Mystique” and Andrea Dworkin, author of “Pornography: Men Possessing Women,” in a feminist conference intervention on politics. It was prompted by the assertion that women should vote for Hillary Clinton for president.

“Woman Is President” snapped on screen. It read, “More women voted than men in every election since 1984.” At the end, the conference showcased the many struggles women politicians go through just to be taken seriously.

Freshman journalism major Janell Witherspoon said, “The play was hilarious! I loved it! They made a lot of good points, especially about the female playwrights.”

“Silence is Violence” concluded with a dramatization of an acquaintance rape situation. Harper periodically stopped a young sorority girl, advising her to, “set boundaries.”

Each boundary portrayed ways in which women can avoid date rape by not going back to a stranger’s apartment, not accepting drinks that they didn’t open, and only doing what they feel is comfortable.

A poignant slideshow ended the evening:

A scribbled phone number on a matchbook.

“This is not an invitation to rape me,” Sexton said.

A wedding photograph.

“This is not an invitation to rape me,” Evans said.

Feb. 13 – “From Attitude To Activism” Workshop

“Now jog around in a grid!” shouted Evans from atop a red chair.

Everyone obeyed. Jogging, laughing and nearly running into one another, the 50 or so participants in Student Union Room 208 followed Evans’s every command. After all, this was an exercise for all involved to shake their mental hang-ups and get warmed up for an evening of activist plotting.

The Guerrilla Girls workshop aimed to teach civic-minded students, faculty and staff on the art of grabbing attention to your cause through effective poster composing.

Behn, Sexton, Harper and Evans lined up in front of eager activists ready to learn at their altar.

After the warm-up, it was time to brainstorm.

The Girls wanted participants to hone their message to specific issues. What started out as discrimination, environmentalism, racism and homophobia turned into recycling, immigration, sex workers’ rights, body image and genocide.

Provocative messages were posted up onto the wall, one by one.

A quiz on gender stereotypes used simplicity to address a complex issue. The simple, multiple-choice format was used to ask, “Boys cry... always, sometimes, never? Girls act properly... always, sometimes, never? I believe gender stereotypes... always, sometimes, never?”

Another poster, depicting the women’s bathroom icon bent over a toilet with the words “That’s Hot!” and “Is Bulimia Really Hot?” hit home the message using pop culture iconography.

“The Girls were really impressed with posters, “ said Christina Hernandez, outreach coordinator at the Jean Nidetch Women’s Center. They are now proudly displayed at the Women’s Center.

Mark Skinner, a History, Latin American Studies and Spanish triple-major, participated in the workshop.

“I liked the chance to get together in a group of people and work on something. I think that’s what the exercise was all about; working together,” he said. “Also, it seemed to me that there wasn’t enough constructive criticism. It was more of a “feel-good” exercise than actually a learning exercise.”

When asked if they would return, Hernandez laughed, “If we can raise the money again!”

If the Girls don’t return to UNLV, they may return to Vegas for their own pleasure.

Streaming behind the credits after Thursday's play, the Girls rode, fell off and hung on to a magic carpet across the Las Vegas Strip, something they filmed at the Luxor, further exemplifying that feminists can be funny.

The Jean Nidetch Women's Center is located on campus and can be reached at 895-4475. Guerrilla Girls On Tour can be found online at guerrillagirlsontour.com.