

*Arts & Entertainment*

# Play addresses repercussions of 9/11 attacks

by Peter Rambo

Understanding. That's what Penn State Professor Charles Dumas hoped to bring to the people of South Africa when he first wrote *911: A Day in the Life of a People*, performed this year on the Penn State campus. The play is split into two acts and three moments in time. The first act takes place on Sept. 11, 2001, and on the first anniversary of the terrorist attacks. The second act takes place on the fourth anniversary of the attacks and was performed for the first time this Sept. 11.

The play follows 12 people affected by the terror of Sept. 11, 2001. Some of the characters are fictitious, some are amalgamations of witnesses' stories and some are based on personal experience, said playwright Charles Dumas. The first act is told through monologue, as the characters tell their stories to the audience. The first character to be introduced is a young waiter named Juan Rodriguez. Juan (played by Devin Oliver), is both a tragic and hopeful character; he intends to be the first in his family to go to college and describes the "sunrise in the east." Other characters include a dairy farmer from near Somerset, Pa., a homeless man who lives in the tunnels underneath the World Trade Center, a

traffic reporter who was in the air when the planes hit, a New York public school student, a Muslim woman who owns a diner in New York, a soldier stationed at the Pentagon, a pregnant woman, an actress whose husband should have been in New York, a stockbroker who lost most of her co-workers, a firefighter who went up the stairs to help others down, and a nurse who worked in New York five days in a row after the attack.

The play's first audience, in South Africa, had seen television news reports about the Sept. 11 attacks but were removed from the events, Dumas explained after the show. The play put a human face on the tragedy in a way that news reports could not. The purpose of the play was not to present a factual portrayal but to capture the effects of the day on characters representing people who experienced the event, he said. Instead of 3,000 dead, the audience saw Juan, stuck on the floors above the intense fire. They heard people saying that the fire below was too hot to pass through. They saw Juan sitting in an office and watching as people started to jump out the windows. They heard him say, "The idea of suicide had never entered my mind ... there was no escaping the fire

... the window. What the hell, there might be a miracle."

Dumas said he expected the response to the performance at the Pavilion Theater Sunday, Sept. 11, to be "healing" and hoped that "these performances will help shed light on the experience and struggles of a representative and diverse group of American people."

The events of Sept. 11 are complicated, and this play deals with more than individual response to tragedy. It tackles the divisive environment left in the wake of Sept. 11. The stockbroker (Lynette Anderson) is the only black woman working on the stock exchange. The last line before the play jumps ahead a year in time is hers: "I'm glad the people who did this weren't black."

A year later the Muslim diner owner (Crystal Endsley) says she and her husband "Love it here." They have changed the diner's name from Oasis to Al Salam, meaning "peace." In New York, people are decent to her; it is elsewhere in America that things are different.

The soldier (Alano Miller) has transferred to a unit in Afghanistan because he wants revenge. He wants to "make it hot for [Osama Bin Laden] wherever he goes."

The mother (MeShae Brooks) has mixed

feelings about Sept. 11. It was a day of terrible tragedy, but it was also the day on which she discovered she was pregnant. The first act ends with the mother expressing a hopeful outlook for the future.

Sept. 11, 2005, was the first performance of the second act, which takes place on that date. Instead of a series of monologues, the story is told by following the reporter (Ivonne D'Amato) as she interviews characters. The plot raises questions about treatment of terrorists, both suspected and convicted, and the effects of the attacks and the resulting security measures on relations between people. It also looks at the way U.S. authorities have handled the situation. But the juxtaposition of styles of Act I to Act II was awkward. The playwright could have raised the same questions just as provocatively and artistically as he does in the first act, without using the reporter to connect the dots. It is a shock to see characters who moments ago bared their soul to the audience now converse with each other on stage.

The play has been performed at Penn State the past three years and will be performed at Penn State branch campuses and possibly in New York in the next year, Dumas said.

# Films less than a minute long appeal to sophisticates

by Kyle Taylor

In 1895 the brothers Lumière created the first motion pictures with their invention, the cinematographe. The movies were silent, and each lasted no longer than a minute. One hundred years later, 40 acclaimed directors from around the world were asked to use restored cinematographes to create their own masterpieces, which were then put together in *Lumière and Company*.

The rules were simple. Each film could be no longer than 52 seconds, the directors were not allowed to use synchronous sound, and they only got three takes. The results were mixed.

Many of the directors decided to take snapshots of human life, in the tradition of the original Lumière films. This would not

have been a problem if fewer directors had taken this route. Another popular approach was to turn the camera on itself. About half of the films fall into one of these two categories.

Some of the filmmakers come off as pretentious. Spike Lee films his daughter for 52 seconds, hoping to capture her first words on the cinematographe. He seems more interested in showing off his child than in the project itself. Kiju Yoshida brags about the limitations of the camera and tries to prove his point by demonstrating that a video camera is unable to capture the center of a nuclear explosion.

Still, the project inspired some very good films. Patrice Leconte's is interesting for fans of the medium: he set up his cinematographe at La Ciotat train station, where

one of Lumière's original films was shot. Zhang Yimou set up his Lumière device on the Great Wall. The film begins with a man and a woman dressed in traditional Chinese clothing. Suddenly, another man jumps in front of the camera with a clapboard. The man and woman throw off their clothes, pull out guitars and start jamming. Nirvana is playing in the background.

It would be impossible to talk about *Lumière and Company* without mentioning David Lynch's sci-fi tribute, easily the highlight of the film. In his 52 seconds, Lynch shows a sequence of police questioning a 1950s-era family and a cultish group of aliens holding a woman hostage. Of all the films, his is the most innovative.

In between the films, the directors are asked questions such as "Why do you

film?" and "Do you think cinema is mortal?" The quality of the responses, like the films, is varied. Most directors gave similar responses, especially to the question about the mortality of cinema. Most felt that it is mortal, since it is a human creation. One director said he saw evidence that cinema is dying on its feet already.

*Lumière and Company* is an interesting film for sophisticated moviegoers. For those interested in the history of cinema, The film provides a glimpse of what it was like in the beginning. And for those who just want to see their favorite director's film, the chapters in the DVD allow for selective viewing.

*Lumière and Company* is on reserve in the Media and Arts section of Penn State's Pattee Library.