By DB Leonard
For the Times Herald-Record
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"Eugenia," written by New Zealand playwright Lorae Parry and directed by Anita Gonzalez, will be performed at SUNY New Paltz from March 1-11 in the Parker Theater. The play is a debut for the region, having been performed only once in the United States, at the University of Wisconsin.

"Eugenia is a woman of passion, constantly immersed in feelings of transformation," said Gonzalez.

"Eugenia" takes place in parallel stories, set in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1916 and in the present day. The play follows the real life tale of Eugenia Martelli, an Italian woman who immigrates to New Zealand and marries a woman. In 1916, there is a love triangle and a murder. In the present, a drama teacher presents a play based on Eugenia's true story, confronting a conservative base and forcing all involved to confront their own identities.

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What: "Eugenia"

When: 8 p.m. March 1-3, 8-10; 2 p.m. March 4, 11

Where: Parker Theatre, SUNY New Paltz, 1 Hawk Drive, New Paltz

Price: $18; $16 seniors, faculty, staff; $9 students

Call: 257-3880

Visit: www.newpaltz.edu/theatre

"The power of the play is how you become enmeshed — it's like a hardscrabble working-class life in which these women were trying to love each other," said Gonzalez. "They suffered violence for being who they were. And that, I think, continues today."

Thematically, the sacrifices of love are evident in the extreme, in dying for love and having it betrayed.

"Society around Eugenia will not let her express that passionate love because of their perception of what her gender identity should be," explained Gonzalez.

At SUNY, the all-student ensemble consists of six actors who will perform a total of 13 characters. What's more, each of the actors will perform in at least two dialects: Irish, Italian, Cockney or working-class "Kiwi" from New Zealand.

"Eugenia" provides "an excellent exploration of how passing women lived in the past," added Gonzalez. In the 18th and 19th centuries, "passing women" were those who assumed the roles of men, in their work and domestic lives.

The music for "Eugenia," composed by Stephen Kitsakos, is instrumental in the fluidity and message of the play. The Italian-themed songs literally set the stage for Eugenia's authentic self to shine. Said Gonzalez: "It's revolutionary in her time for Eugenia to be herself."

"Eugenia" presents a challenging and unflinching look at sexuality and its role in society. Gonzalez is pleased that the Department of Theatre Arts at SUNY is putting on the play, one that she considers "experimental and controversial." As director, Gonzalez has one underlying goal.

"I'm hoping that the audience will see the humanity in the play."