

'Home' and 'Action': What a Country!

HOME by John Monteleone and **ACTION** by Sam Shepard. Two one-act plays directed by Monteleone, with Linda Holleran, Greg Bodkin, Abby Richter and Ray Gobes Jr. ("Home"); Barbara DeBolt, Cathleen Kondrick, Dominic Lampman and Nick Levis ("Action"). Set, costumes and lighting by Monteleone. At Dowling College Performing Arts Center, Oakdale, today through Sunday.

By Aileen Jacobson

STAFF WRITER

WITH A YOUNGER man's foot resting lightly on her head, the result of her maneuvering, a woman named Septa begs him: "Make me feel contemporary again." She wants to be abused, she says, because it's "so American."

This scene from John Monteleone's new absurdist one-act play, "Home," would be funny anyway, in its own perverse way. But it gains added resonance in light of the recent Madonna apologia on "Nightline" for her own use of chains in a video, in which the singer explained that it's OK because she chained herself. The play's comic bit is contemporary, indeed, which is what playwright-director Monteleone has in mind.

Pairing his own work with Sam Shepard's "Action" (first produced Off-Broadway in 1975), Monteleone explores the modern family through two cryptic, nonrealistic works. "Action" is tight and bleak. "Home," a work in progress, is sprawling, with many bright spots but badly in need of editing.

Monteleone, an artist in residence at Dowling College, where the double bill is being presented, has consciously meshed some of his themes — the meanings of family, home and community in an increasingly alienating world — with Shepard's.



Ray Gobes Jr. and Linda Holleran in 'Home'

"Action," second on the program, is the more difficult play, partly because it is set in a remote, apocalyptic world populated by earthy-looking women and bald, humanoid-type men, and partly because it is acted by students whose inexperience obscures much of the play's impact.

"Home" is presented by a combination of actors from the Actors' Workshop Theater Company, an adult group that Monteleone directs, and by students — but these are assured. In fact, the entire cast strikes the right attitude in delivering their bizarre, jagged dialogues and

monologues with a manic energy. Most of what they say and do seems at the same time a heightened depiction of what goes on behind closed doors in a more-or-less normal household, and a view of a truly screwy place.

There are frequent references to death (all or some of this family of four — mother, father, son and mother's sister — already may have passed away; they could be the Munsters of the '90s), incest and madness.

There also are occasional, overly precious references to the play as play: "Is this a Greek tragedy?" asks the brittle mother, Mar (Linda Holleran), during a spat with her sister. "It's an American tragic farce," answers sis Separ (Abby Richter).

The father, Hom (Greg Bodkin), wears strange costumes (by Monteleone, who also designed the set, lighting and makeup, all fine for the workshop setting) and speaks in abbreviated locution. "Where have you been?" Mar asks. "In world," he replies. He looks as though he's been mugged but, actually, he long ago suffered a nervous breakdown, diagnosed by a doctor as "a reaction to life."

Ray Gobes Jr. gives an antic performance as Rat, the son. Having left home that morning as a well-kept, recent college honors grad, he returns wrapped in leather, weapons and obscenities. "I'm free now, free forever," he screams, the incarnation of a parent's nightmare. Unfortunately, he also provokes his aunt's lust. It's all, as the contemporary Separ says, "so American." / ■