

# The New York Times

## Theater in Review



Amy Meadow/"The Breaks"

**Life Stories** Rae C. Wright, far left, and Deb Margolin are the co-authors and stars of "The Breaks," a play about a friendship that develops between two women who work in a nursing home and tell each other about their lives during breaks. Directed by Cheryl Katz, it opens tomorrow night at the Women's Interart Center.

### **The Breaks**

Women's Interart Center  
549 West 52d Street  
Manhattan  
Through May 23

Written and performed by Deb Margolin and Rae C. Wright; directed by Cheryl Katz; set by Christina Weppner; lighting by Jeff Zeidman; costumes by Linda Gui; production stage manager, Dan Geist. Presented by the Interart Theater, Margot Lewitin, artistic director.

While caring for the elderly patients in a nursing home, two nurses take periodic breaks for cigarettes and conversation. Sitting at a table in a large broom closet, they talk about their work and reveal aspects of their lives. The play, "The Breaks," written and performed by Deb Margolin and Rae C. Wright, is a small, gently observant mood piece in which intimacy is established through the most indirect of means.

The play begins like an actors' improvisation, but gradually a story emerges and each character is individualized. Before the slice of life has run its brief course, theatergoers share in the confidentiality. Through their subtle performances, the actresses enhance their writing. Each seems to have the closest affinity with her character.

At first, Marian (Ms. Margolin) is subdued to the point of being passive. Holding back her emotions, she is hesitant even to speak about the slights that fill her everyday life. Ms. Margolin underlines the strain of her character, the feeling that she wants to break out and fight against her repression.

Betty (Ms. Wright) is easily agitated, ready to arm herself for domestic warfare and eager to give her opinion on any issue. She has the more outgoing personality, and is free with jokes and anecdotes, many of them drawn from her patients. Ms. Wright skillfully shades the effusiveness with sudden changes of mood. Repeatedly she drifts into a reverie as the character remembers her single, memorable trip to Nicaragua.

Despite that journey, both women are homebodies in a drastically limited world, without psychological or cultural outlets. Had we overheard the two of them talking in a public place, we might have tuned out. Listening to their series of dialogues — taking place during a one-year period — our curiosity is piqued. Though fragmented, the play has a cumulative effect, lifting two seemingly average people above prototype and involving theatergoers in the privacy of their lives. Cheryl Katz has given the work a compact staging within the carefully cluttered closet designed by Christina Weppner.

The play is less about the work situation in the nursing home than about the growing mutual dependency of the women. In their breaks, they have found a sanctuary. When Marian has to face her own illness, she realizes that Betty is the only person she can talk to about it; they are sisters in sympathy. Intuitively, they have participated in an act of bonding.

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