

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Theater Troupe to Premiere Medieval — and Bawdy — French Farces at UCSB

They were the sitcoms of their time -- lowbrow comedies that lampooned every serious topic, from sex and relationships to politics and religion. Now a quartet of these theatrical gems will premiere at UC Santa Barbara on Friday, May 17.

Directed by Betty Ellzey and performed by The Rude Mechanicals Medieval and Renaissance Players, who hail from Shepherd University in West Virginia, the four comedies are drawn from " 'The Farce of the Fart' and Other Ribaldries -- Twelve Medieval French Plays in Modern English," an anthology of translations by Jody Enders, professor of French at UCSB.

The performance begins at 5 p.m. in Theater and Dance West 1701 at UCSB. It is free and open to the public. On the program are "The Farce of the Fart," "Confession Lessons," "Monk-ey Business," and "Cooch E. Whippet." In addition, a question-and-answer session with the actors and Enders will follow.

"It's tremendously exciting that Betty Ellzey's troupe is coming to UCSB," said Enders, a theater historian and author of four other books. "In her work with gifted undergraduates from West Virginia, she has really been able to capture the liveliness of a 15th-century comedy that few modern audiences get to see."

The show is presented in conjunction with the UCSB Medieval Studies Graduate Student Conference, which continues through Saturday, May 18, in the McCune Conference Room, 6020.

For centuries, the scripts for these outrageous, anonymously written shows were available only in French editions collected from miscellaneous print and manuscript sources. In her translations, Enders captures the colorful characters, coarse humor, and outrageous plot lines of medieval drama that have, for the most part, been accessible to contemporary readers and theater audiences.

"There's an unfortunate tendency to think that because a play was written in a now-dead language like the Middle French of the 15th century, it is esoteric and inaccessible," Enders said. "But that's not the case at all. The French farces are still hilarious, and contemporary in so many ways. The Middle Ages still have so much to tell us about ourselves -- especially when we forget our sense of humor."

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.