

## 'Bridge Party' opens on Arena Stage today

By **GLORIANE PECK**  
The State News

Amentha Dymally remembers picking up the paper for her father when she was a little girl in 1942.

"Almost every week there was a photograph of lynching," said Dymally, who was 6 years old and just learning to read. "It was a too-common occurrence in our country."

Tonight Dymally brings her experience to her performance in East Lansing resident Sandra Seaton's "The Bridge Party." The show opens at 7:30 p.m. on the Arena Stage in the Auditorium.

"The Bridge Party" tells of several women who gather for their weekly bridge game in the South in 1942. While the women are playing bridge, they hear word of the acquittal of a 14-year-old African-American boy accused of "interfering" with a white woman, said the play's director, Mary Job.

Seaton wrote the play in 1989 while she was completing her master's degree in creative writing at MSU.

During a rehearsal this week, Seaton said she started to believe she was a part of the summer afternoon.

"It becomes more than words," said Seaton, who grew up in Tennessee. "The actors breathe life into the play."

The women at the bridge party stand tall as the afternoon's events unfold, said Seaton, an English professor at Central Michigan University. "I wanted to show that, in spite of the violence and the brutality of the world around them, these women were able to lead productive lives and they were spirited and giving."

Often, African-American characters are not fully developed in TV programs and movies, Seaton said. "You don't see them as having personal lives and being fully complicated."

She set out to change that with her play.

"I wanted to show them in their full complications and all their

humanity," she said.

Job said the characters are well-developed through everyday life. "Sometimes the stories seem quite ordinary or trivial, but they reveal character very well."

Throughout the day, the characters learn to use every resource they have, said Job, a theater graduate student. "The invasion of the white power system ... really forces them to examine their beliefs," she said. "It makes them recognize that they can survive and not only can they survive, but sometimes they can overcome."

Two of these complicated characters are played by Dymally and Adilah Barnes, who were recruited from Los Angeles for the show.

The two bring experience in touring shows, movies and TV series.

"Amentha and Adilah are handing down their experience and their knowledge to the young women in the play," Seaton said.

One reason for bringing in the actresses was the small base of African Americans involved in Lansing-area theater, Seaton said.

People need to encourage more African-American men and women to get involved in theater, she said. "We just need to groom them and bring them up through the process."

Job said, however, that the Department of Theatre was trying to provide experienced actresses to more than compensate for a shortage.

The need for more involvement in theater is there, she said. "MSU and any theater needs to be open and needs to encourage young people to get involved, whatever their race and culture," she said.

"Theater needs as many voices as possible, as many experiences as possible because to me the essence of theater is human beings."

"The Bridge Party" plays at 7:30 tonight, 8 p.m. Friday, 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Saturday and 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Sunday. Tickets cost \$5. For more information, call 355-6690.



Seaton