

Behind the scenes in theater arts

By Nancy Feigenbaum
Staff Writer

It's almost 10 o'clock in Blocker. Time for class.

The students in Room 144 heap books and raincoats on chairs bunched up at the back of the room ... and start to stretch.

A gym class in Blocker?

No.

At 10 a.m. Mary Anne Mitchell, assistant professor of speech communication, walks in. Dressed in an old pair of Gloria Vanderbilt jeans, a white blouse and maroon platform heels, she warns the class:

"I hope you all read Chapter 11."

At her instructions the 18

people in the room, mostly women, scatter to stretch. One person stands on a huge stage-ladder, another sits at a table. A few others are littered among several living rooms' worth of old-fashioned furniture.

Theater Arts 275 is off.

"The way you're going to warm up is to explore space today," Mitchell instructs. "Any way you want."

Someone starts moaning.

Soon others are dancing, jumping, and waving their arms around, just a few corridors from the staid classes of the business majors.

"Let the sound go," Mitchell orders.

The level of moaning rises like the eerie mood music of a cheap horror film. Parts of it

look like a horror flick, too. In the next hour these theater arts majors survive mob violence, arguments, love scenes, and some rough physical confrontations, learning to do consciously, the things we do unconsciously every day. They learn to do them consciously and make them look natural and it's not easy.

Both theater arts students and professors are insulted by the notion that the major is an easy one.

"We defy others to try and keep our schedule," says associate professor of theater arts Mike Greenwald, at an Aggie Players rehearsal of "Twelfth Night."

"These kids are in here six

nights a week. All this for one credit," he says.

Deena Elliot, who double majors in theater arts and agricultural journalism, says there have been weeks when she gets only two hours sleep a night, and she's come to consider four hours a night acceptable.

"(Theater) is something you have to rehearse and practice every day," she says.

The best actor, like any other professional, makes the work look easy. But the number of lines to be memorized in a light-hearted play like "Twelfth Night" is staggering.

Several times in the course of rehearsal, the lovelorn Countess Olivia, played by freshman Diedre Doigg, snaps out of her reverie to call out "line?"

Doigg got the lead part when the original actress got sick, says

Steve McCauley (left), a freshman theater arts major, plays Toby Belch in the Aggie Players' production of "Twelfth Night," a comedy written by William Shakespeare. Freshman physics major Casey Melarcher (right) plays Andrew Aguecheek.

