



Polonius (Richard Elmore) offers advice to his daughter Ophelia (Gayle Bellows) in the Oregon Shakespearean Festival production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which runs through October 30 in the Angus Bowmer Theatre.

Oregon Shakespearean Festival Opens

The Oregon Shakespearean Festival in Ashland, Oregon, opened its largest winter/spring season ever this past weekend. In the Angus Bowmer Theater the festival is producing Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Shaw's *Man and Superman*, O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness*, and Thornton Wilder's *The Matchmaker*. In the smaller Black Swan Theater, the festival is doing the companion piece to *Man and Superman*, *Don Juan in Hell*. John Osborne's *The Entertainer* is also being done in the Black Swan.

Not only are six plays a record number of plays for the festival to open in a winter/spring season, but four of these plays are giant productions. *Hamlet* requires dozens of actors and nearly four hours of running time. *Man and Superman* requires three different sets, and *Ah, Wilderness* requires four different sets. *The Matchmaker* also has four different sets.

The Shakespearean festival has also taken on nearly twenty equity actors. This is the largest number of equity performers ever employed by the Oregon Shakespearean Festival.

The result of this large investment is some spectacular theater. In some of the bigger productions, staying in the hall during the set changes at intermission is almost as entertaining as the play. The most impressive of these changes is in the first intermission during *Man and Superman*. A full size mock-up of a 1906 automobile rises out of the floor to become the central prop of act two.

But sets and props do not make good plays or good productions—actors, directors, and writers do that.

The large number of equity actors at the festival this year shows itself in the age of the actors. If you're used to going to Ashland and seeing men and women in their late twenties playing characters twenty or thirty years older than themselves, you'll find that's the exception not the rule this year. And though an equity card does not automatically mean a good actor—the maturity of the equity people has given the festival a more adult image than it has ever had.

The direction in all the plays is excellent. James Moll, who is directing Shaw's *Man and Superman* and *Don Juan in Hell*, deserves special recognition for making Shaw's mountains of words exciting and listenable through both plays. Robert Benedetti, who is directing *Hamlet*, also deserves recognition for his interpretation of the theater's greatest enigma. The best thing Benedetti has done is to treat *Hamlet*—as a play. Too often directors of *Hamlet* get so involved in *Hamlet*, himself, they forget that Shakespeare put life into the other characters of the play as well.

The selection of plays is not only ambitious—it's impressive. *Ah, Wilderness* is not Eugene O'Neill's greatest play, but it is his only comedy. The play shows the happy family life that is missing in the lives of O'Neill's tragic characters. The two Ber-

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nard Shaw plays are actually one play, with act three being performed in another theater. *Don Juan in Hell* is always taken out of *Man and Superman* to avoid an hour-and-a-half of digression right in the middle of the play. John Osborne's *The Entertainer* is a strong play about the effects of war on people. It has a weak third act, but the other two acts are some of the best writing to be done for modern British theater. *Hamlet* is *Hamlet*. *The Matchmaker* is *Hello Dolly!* without the music.

The Oregon Shakespearean Festival has bitten off quite a chunk. For the most part they've been able to digest it pretty well. There were a lot of rough spots in the opening performances, but nothing that can't be cleaned up. The main thing to worry about in a season this big is that they don't over-tax themselves. If their eyes turn out to be too big for their stomachs—if they don't have a good showing at the box office—they could wind up on an unplanned fast some time in the near future.

—John Mitchell

For tickets to the Oregon Shakespearean Festival, call (503) 482-4331, in Ashland. There are no ticket outlets in Eugene. However, Carl Greve Jewelers, on the Downtown Mall, has brochures and information on all the plays, and related tourist information as well.

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21	22 Quickfile 7-9:30 pm	23	24 Intro to Computers 7-9:30 pm	26
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