

Elizabethan Theatre Opens

The Oregon Shakespearean Festival in Ashland opened its Elizabethan Theater last week. From now until September 24th three Shakespearean plays will be alternating in the 1,100 seat outdoor theater. The festival is performing one of the most popular of Shakespeare's history plays, *Richard the Third*. It is also doing two, not so often produced Shakespearean plays, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Cymbeline*, a play about pre-Norman Briton under Roman occupation.

Much Ado About Nothing was written when Shakespeare was writing his other three comedies with ambiguous titles: *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*; or *What You Will*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*.

Of these four plays, *Much Ado* is the least interesting. With the exception of Beatrice and Benedick (the play's heroine and hero) all of the characters are stereotypical. Like *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado* seems to have been written in haste—maybe under a tight deadline.

The Shakespearean Festival is doing the play at a rapid pace—getting its best moments out of Joan Stuart-Morris as Beatrice and Wesley Grant as Benedick.

Cymbeline is an oddity among Shakespeare's plays. It was written late in his career. It was the first of what is sometimes referred to as Shakespeare's romantic plays. The other two in this group are *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. What these three plays have in common is: They have a strong element of tragedy in them, but they all have the happy ending of a comedy. There is a strong emphasis on the poetic nature of the language and less emphasis on character development. The main action of the three plays takes place in nature—very pastoral.

In Ashland the festival's production of *Cymbeline* is putting a lot of its energy into the reading of the poetry. They are not doing the play as seriously as it is usually done, but they are reading the lines clearly and rhythmically. And it's a good deal of fun on a summer's night.

Richard the Third is an actor's play. Playing Richard is a plumb part for an actor. Hamlet might be the only Shakespearean part more coveted by actors.

In Ashland John Aylward is playing Richard as more malevolent than cunning. This has a tendency to blur Richard's legendary intelligence.

Beside these three plays the festival is still doing *Hamlet* in the Angus Bowmer Theater (the large indoor theater). In the same theater it is still doing Eugene O'Neill's *Ah Wilderness*. The festival is also still performing the two Bernard Shaw plays, *Man and Superman* (in the Bowmer Theater) and



Iachimo (Barry Kraft) spies upon the sleeping princess Imogen (Brenda Hubbard) in Shakespeare's romantic drama *Cymbeline*, playing on the outdoor Elizabethan Stage through Sept. 22.

Don Juan in Hell (in the smaller Black Swan theater). They are still doing John Osborne's *The Entertainer* in the Black Swan. And in the Angus Bowmer they are doing a play that opened April 29th, *What the Butler Saw* by British writer, Joe Orton.

Butler is a phrase. In Ashland it goes at a fast clip, is well acted, and features Eugene actress, Priscilla Hake-Lauris playing an alcoholic nymphomaniac married to the head of a psychiatric institute. She's very funny.

The three outdoor productions have the usual fast pace associated with the festival. *Richard the Third* is like a locomotive. The costumes in *Cymbeline* and *Much Ado About Nothing* are spectacular. *Much Ado* is being done in 18th century costumes—large hoop skirts for the women and three pointed hats for the men (but no white wigs). The costumes for *Richard the Third* have been kept subdued and military.

The acting in Ashland this summer is better, over all, than it has been in the ten years I've been going there. The festival's

new policy of using more Equity (union) performers is really paying off. The skill of the professionals is adding depth to the plays that was only occasionally there in years past.

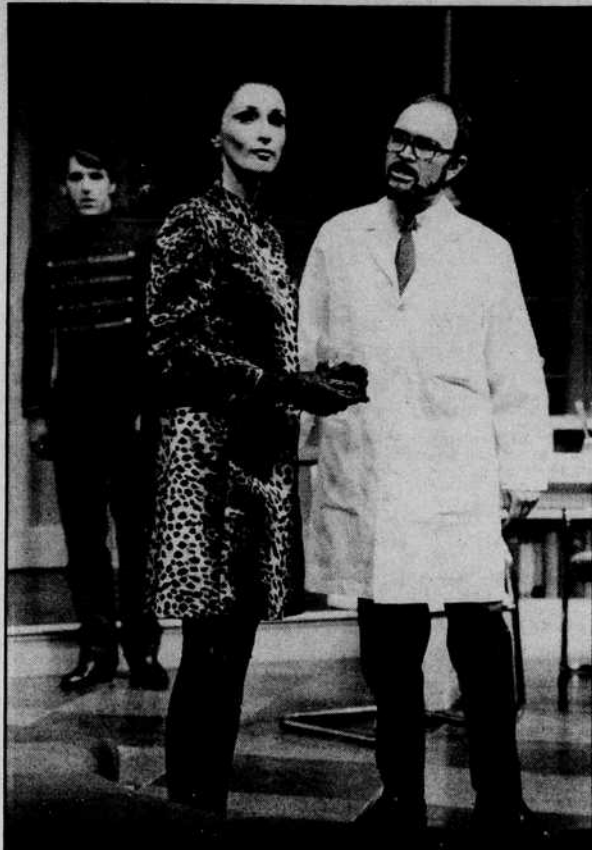
If this summer season has a weakness, it's the selection of the plays for the outdoor theater. Both *Cymbeline* and *Much Ado About Nothing* have long slow moments. And *Richard the Third*, though it has a great central character, is an early Shakespearean play, episodic in its structure.

Of course, the advantage is that you may never see a production of *Cymbeline* again in 15 years. And it may be a while before you get to see *Much Ado* again. *Richard the Third* gets produced quite often.

So, the Oregon Shakespearean Festival is open for its 48th year. If you want to see some fine acting—get on down there!

—John Mitchell

For tickets to the Oregon Shakespearean Festival in Ashland, call (503) 482-4331.



What the Butler Saw, starring Daniel Mayers, Eugene actress Priscilla Hake Lauris, and Philip Davidson, is now playing in the Angus Bowmer Theatre at the Oregon Shakespearean Festival in Ashland.

At the Brass Rail

Fresh Entertainment

On the Edge wowed its opening night audience last Thursday at the Brass Rail, Eugene's newest theatre-cabaret, with fresh and fast moving comedy, improvisations, original music, and some well developed skits—especially considering the group only closed its last show May 21.

From the first ring of the telephone in the opening skit, "Lullaby of Beltline," the audience is thrilled with original music and comedy by talented performers. Known as *On the Edge*, the group is composed of locals Dan Bruno, Janet McIntyre, Martha Moyer, Jerry Campbell, Ernesto Ravelto, Cheyney Ryan and off-stage technician/author/director Bob Webb.

Each member of the group gets an opportunity to demonstrate their special and varied talents. There is suspense, surprise, and plenty of laughs.

Many preferred the improvisations best—seeing several of the group rise to the challenge of a sophisticated and playful audience.

I most enjoyed the original skits based on local geography, headlines and familiar stories (like *Westside Story*). Watching the "preppies" and the "hippies" work it out in "West Sixth Story" is a suitable finale, and brought many in the audience to a standing ovation—well deserved!

On the Edge continues June 23, 24 & 25 and June 30, July 1 & 2. Cabaret seating at the Brass Rail, 4th and Willamette, is only \$3. Good news travels fast and they're nearly sold out, so call soon for reservations, 342-2298. And look ahead to the Cascade Balzac Company's *Sex on the Second Floor* beginning July 7, also at the Brass Rail.

—Bill Snyder

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