

From the Oregon Shakespearean Festival
The Ashland Report

by Dorothy Velasco

All's Well That Ends Well

All's Well That Ends Well, in a beguiling outdoor production, is delighting the crowds at Ashland's Elizabethan Stage. The plot, inspired by the Decameron of Boccaccio, centers around Helena, the daughter of a poor but renowned physician. After her father dies Helena goes to live with a kind countess, and falls in love with the countess's young son Bertram.

When Helena cures the ailing King of France, he promises to marry her to any nobleman she chooses. Helena chooses Bertram, who isn't ready to give up his freedom. He vows to "wed her but not bed her" and with his scurrilous friend Parolles, goes to Italy to fight for the Duke of Florence. He will return to France only when his wife produces a child by him. Helena follows her husband in disguise, manages to change places with a young Florentine, and slips into her husband's bed. Needless to say, all's well that ends well.

This colorful production, cleverly directed by Tony Amendola, succeeds in spite of a few wrong choices. To set the play in Napoleonic times, when there was no

reigning King of France, is a blatant error. Elizabeth Ury as Helena is sincere and believable, but she misses her chances to be humorous. Wesley Grant Bishop is miscast as Bertram, who should be a lively, raffish youth temporarily lacking good sense. Instead he is almost world-weary. We wonder why the intelligent Helena would even want him. Both actors have done better work in other plays.

Nevertheless, *All's Well That Ends Well* is so much fun, with such lively and inventive staging, such surprising effects, and such humorous acting, especially by Barry Kraft as the good-for-nothing Parolles, that the audience is absolutely charmed. In an excellent ensemble scene poor Parolles receives his comeuppance from a group of his soldier companions who are fed up with his bragging, ridiculous ways. It would be difficult to find a more entertaining production of this light popular comedy.

The Life and Death of King John

The Life and Death of King John, also performed on the Elizabethan Stage, gives us Shakespeare's dramatization, and simplification, of uncomplicated events in the early history of England and France, when the royal families and lands were confusingly intertwined. This production, ably directed by Pat Patton, offers a convenient chart of the family tree as part of the scenery.

King John, played by James Edmondson, has usurped the English throne from his young nephew Arthur, who lives in the French court. King Philip of France, urged by Arthur's ambitious mother Constance, vows to defend Arthur's right to the throne. Car-

dinal Pandulph, the Pope's representative, further complicates matters with his chameleon-like ability to change his colors at will. After young Arthur is taken prisoner by the English, his mother soon dies of grief. In the end, King John has been poisoned by a monk and the borders of England and France are vastly changed.

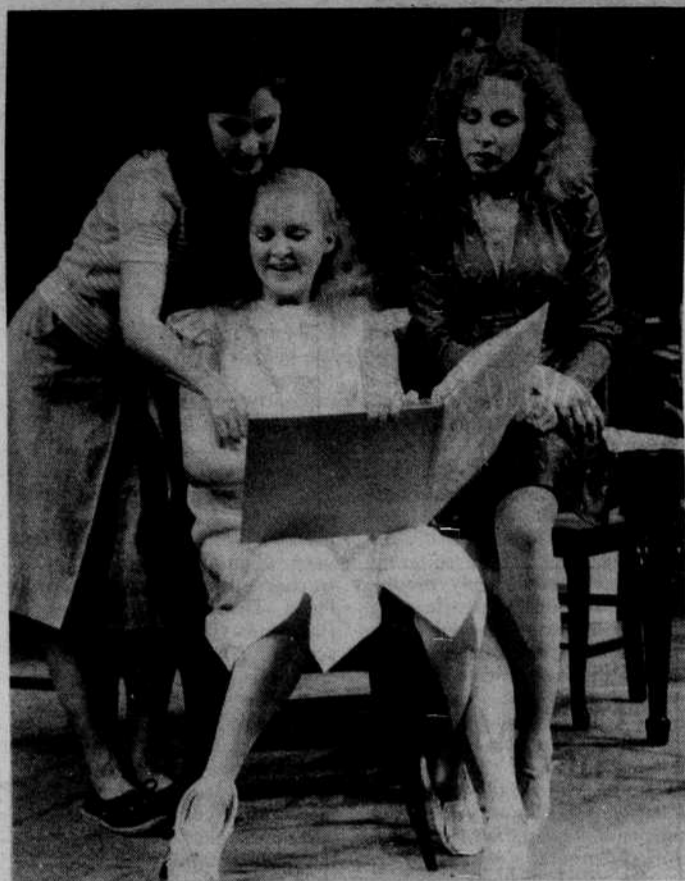
The best lines in the play are given to Philip Faulconbridge, the illegitimate son of Richard the Lionhearted. As played by John David Castellanos, he is an honest opportunist, loyal to the royal family, and more honorable than its legitimate members. He is Shakespeare's mouthpiece, and his pithy observations are always thought-provoking.

Although Castellanos receives the strongest applause at the end of the play, the most moving role belongs to Joan Stuart-Morris as the unfortunate Constance. Her grief for her child, considered excessive by the Cardinal and the French King, is perfectly understandable. Dan Kremer as the Cardinal is frighteningly cold and conniving, while Larry Paulsen is a spirited King Philip. Corky Dexter is sympathetic as the jailer who grows to love young Arthur, convincingly played by Evan Davidson.

It requires concentration to follow the plot of *King John*, but Shakespeare's shrewd commentary on political power is well worth the effort.

Crimes of the Heart

Crimes of the Heart, Beth Henley's 1981 Pulitzer Prize-winning comedy, is a crowd pleaser throughout the country, and the production at the Bowmer Theatre is no exception. The three main characters, the Magrath sisters, are all equally endearing as they reveal their countless foibles.



The Magrath sisters—played by Priscilla Hake Lauris, Joan Stuart-Morris, and Kamella Tate—peruse a family scrapbook in Beth Henley's *Crimes of the Heart*, on stage in the Angus Bowmer Theatre of the Oregon Shakespearean Festival in Ashland.

The sisters are having "a bad day—a real bad day." These women have real problems, one after another, but the author manages to present every pitfall in a humorous light. So much so that by the time their ailing offstage grandfather lapses into a coma, the sisters, and the audience, find it hysterically funny.

Lenny, the insecure oldest sister, is trying to get through her 30th birthday in Hazelhurst, Mississippi. Meg, the reckless middle one, is suffering from a singing career going nowhere, and Babe, the youngest, has just shot her husband because she "didn't like his stinking looks." Chick, their meddling next-door cousin, pops in periodically to offer unwanted advice. The cast is completed by Barnette Lloyd, Babe's eager young lawyer, and Doc Porter, Meg's old flame who married a Yankee and now has two half-Yankee children.

Crimes of the Heart is wonderfully directed by James Moll. Priscilla Hake Lauris as Lenny couldn't be funnier, and she is perfectly matched by Joan Stuart-Morris as Meg, and Kamella Tate as strange, silly Babe. Elizabeth Ury is just as strong and funny as

the obnoxious Chick, Larry Paulsen is likeable and odd as the lawyer, and James Edmondson is appealing as Doc Porter.

Fortunately, these talented actors have a very funny script to work with. There is never a dull moment and an endless supply of surprises. Beth Henley is very good at doling out little bites of nourishing plot to a hungry audience. We never hear a whole anecdote at once. We are made to wait until we don't expect any more information, and then wham, she hits us with a clincher. The laughs are big because there is plenty of truth in them, and in the seemingly eccentric characters. It's easy to recognize our own idiosyncrasies in this satisfying play.

[Dorothy Velasco is a local author who has written a number of historical dramas, including *The Northwest Woman*, *An Evening with Thomas Condon*, *Prodigal Daughters* and *Oakridge Yesterday*. She is also the author of the book, *Lane County: An Illustrated History of the Emerald Empire*.

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