

Drama and musical highlight city's talent

by Deborah S. McGee

Both *Ladyhouse Blues* and *March of the Falsettos* opened last weekend. *Falsettos* is a Mainstage Cabaret production at Seymour's Restaurant. *Ladyhouse* is a full-length drama staged by and at Lane Community College.

Ladyhouse Blues

Ladyhouse Blues is set in the year 1919, sometimes referred to as the year of the Emancipation of Women, since that's when we started voting. LCC's Patrick Torelle directs the Kevin O'Morrison script about a mother who probably wouldn't vote if she could, for at a tender age she had "six young'un's clinging to (her) skirts" and was widowed to boot. At the time of the play, five children remain, of which the only male is off to war. Two daughters are still at home, but making plans to depart, and two other daughters have come home for a visit.

Suzan Zeitlin plays the mother who's known much tragedy. She's best in an emotionally devastating scene when the audience sees through the cracks of her hard shell surface. Zeitlin gave the scene her all Saturday, at that moment gaining sincere compassion for her odd character.

Eliza Roaring Springs was appropriately icy as the bitter, tight-lipped invalid sister Helen. Renee Jones was breezy and natural as Eylie, the baby sister, a lovable sprite. Lisa Bray as Terry had strong stage presence and was likeably intense as the feminist/political sister.

Karen Gloege brought great class to the play as a statuesque flapper. Her marvelously rich voice was a pleasant surprise: when I saw her as the wicked queen Pompeia in U of O's *Lazarus Laughed*, I knew she could act. Learning of her wider talent is a joy.

Gloege delivered the lyric notes to "Ja Da" in a way which added necessary languor, continuing hazy summer day's effects by Scenic Designer Richard J. Harris and the LCC production staff. The set is softly nostalgic, with an intriguing three-dimensionality of house walls, white spindled porch and the roofs of South St. Louis.

My appreciation of the play was hampered by a strong personal aversion to the play's two main characters. In fact, the play could be subtitled: "Two Characters in Search of a Cross," and I don't know how Zeitlin and Roaring Springs stood being in their shoes so long. I found the other three women far more interesting and wish they had been the focus instead. Oh, well. Others in the audience didn't seem to mind. A lot of talent and energy went into this production.

Although not a musical per se, some of the best moments in *Ladyhouse* come from the tight four-part harmony of the sisters, exquisite a cappella, especially on the old favorite "In the Gloaming." Although they could have been projected more, the voices of street vendors and other city sounds were a nice touch.



From Left: Eliza Roaring Springs as Helen, Suzan Zeitlin as Liz, Lisa Bray as Terry, and Renee Jones as Eylie, in *Ladyhouse Blues*.

March of the Falsettos

The worst thing about last weekend was I didn't get to Mainstage's *March of the Falsettos*. The best thing about next weekend is it will still be here, and other Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays through December.

So why am I excited about this play? Number one, it's the first production in Oregon of a recent Off Broadway hit. Anyone into West Coast theater knows the necessity of occasional blasts of East Coast/Big Apple theater air.

Falsettos comes from the same music theater soil that birthed such world classics as *Cabaret*, *Fiddler*, *La Mancha*, combining music and drama to the delight and enlightenment of so many. It's a tradition that's not carried on much past Broadway lights. Eugene is fortunate to have such a strong pulse of it here.

Further excitement comes from looking at program notes. Let's see, where's Richard Gray in this

one? Ah, ha, he's the director this time and automatically I feel my anticipation of this production increase. I won't bore you with further details of his stellar past—read it in previous reviews by my name. Back to the program . . . super-talented Johnathan Mansfield is musical director. Good sign. Allison Coles is in it, memory banked eternally as the languid vamp dragging out the words "I'm Bored" in Mainstage's *Another Relevant Evening*. Eric James Hadley, too, will appear, who was great as a big brat in Mainstage's recent *Gold Dust*. Aaron K. Douglas, Issa Kitterman and Chad M. McCord round out the cast, names which don't ring a bell, but then Mainstage does draw many of the town's finest.

The play is more on the musical end of the music theater spectrum, being 20 songs strung together with connecting patter. Song titles are another part of my excitement, and I can't wait to hear "Four Jews in a Room Bitching," and "My Father's a Homo."

Winter productions at Seymour's are a special treat. There's something exciting, too, about dressing up a little and traveling through the cold, wet evening to the steam heated streets and buildings of Eugene downtown. Lights are propagating madly along the storefronts now that holidays are coming—the Festival of Lights begins soon.

Romantic, too, is the scene from within Seymour's: the sounds of rhythmic rushes from the buses and their people, the shadows of folks out and walking around, peering in at the play and its people. I wish the food were better for the cabaret menu, but at least it's there.

William Finn wrote the book, lyrics and music of *March of the Falsettos*, and said it's "about being scared to death of love."

Promising shades of Woody Allen movies, Steven Sondheim musicals and TV's soaps, *Falsettos* sounds like another winner from Mainstage Cabaret. "Welkommen, bien venus. . ."

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