

Surface and Symbol

The Emerald's weekly arts and entertainment supplement

Thursday, April 15, 1976

An interview with the director

Local theater stages Kesey drama

Surface and Symbol co-editor Bob Webb obtained the following interview with Ed Chambers, director of the newly-formed Northwest Players' production of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest."

EMERALD: Who are the Northwest Players?

CHAMBERS: A partnership between Nancy Hills, Mark Aguter and myself. We're an independent theater group aimed at doing the best theater we can do.

EMERALD: How did the group come into being?

CHAMBERS: The three of us found ourselves together at a

party. We started comparing notes on what we would like to do in terms of theater in Eugene. It began as a sort of "what if" conversation on the concept of putting a theater group together. We found that we pretty much agreed with each other's ideas and that between the three of us we had enough money to try and tackle one production.

EMERALD: So all of the funding for "Cuckoo's Nest" is coming out of your own pockets?

CHAMBERS: Right.

EMERALD: Why did you choose "Cuckoo's Nest" as your first play?

CHAMBERS: We liked the play

immensely. Each of us had seen the San Francisco production of it on separate occasions last summer. I remember thinking as I watched it that this would really be a hot thing to direct in Eugene. We had kicked several titles around and I finally threw "Cuckoo's Nest" in. It seems we all had been thinking of it at one time or another so we agreed that that would be it. By the way, we decided to do the play last November, before it was announced when the film would be released. I'd read the book about four times before we decided to do the play and I've read it five times since. To me it is THE American novel. "Cuckoo's Nest"

EMERALD: Do you think the play follows the novel very closely?

CHAMBERS: Fairly closely. There are some limitations, of course. I mean you can't stage a fishing trip to Depoe Bay. There are some other problems. For example, most of the book happens through the eyes of Chief Bromden. The Chief is a catatonic deaf and dumb character, and it's handled in an almost total narration form in the book. The play comes closer to that function than I understand the movie does. Apparently one of Kesey's chief complaints about the movie was that it focused more on McMurphy than Bromden. The play doesn't do exactly as the book, but it comes close.

EMERALD: Would you give me some background information on some of your actors?

CHAMBERS: Let's see, R.P. McMurphy is played by Herb Winsted. He is probably better known on campus as the lead singer of a rock group that disbanded some time ago called Da Hots. Jim Peterson plays Chief Bromden. Jim is a 6'8" Swede who obviously fits the part except for the blue eyes and blond hair. We have a nice little cop-out going here because the Indian in the book and the play is established as a half-breed. So we could rationalize the blue eyes. We did, however, get rid of the blond hair. I think it's pretty effective, an Indian with blue eyes. Nurse Ratched is played by a woman new to Eugene named Helen Robinson. She did some summer theater on the coast and a lot of work in different areas at Portland State. Her husband designed the lights and sets for "Cuckoo's Nest." Helen's British, but she does a great job of

getting rid of her accent. She does the best American accent out of a British mouth that I've ever heard. A rather novel thing about this production is that two of the three major characters are being played by almost virtual novices. Yet the supporting cast is made up of well-seasoned actors.

EMERALD: In terms of your directorial approach, what is the play about?

CHAMBERS: The major thing I believe is the combination of people. I believe the show is basically a tragedy, but instead of having one tragic hero it has two: McMurphy and Nurse Ratched. Both have their faults. The audience will probably tend to dislike Nurse Ratched but she is serving a definite purpose in the institution and that is to provide regimentation and a solid approach to making use of the patients' lives as opposed to just letting them sit and



Photo by Greg Wasson

Confrontation between McMurphy (Herb Winsted, left) and Nurse Ratched (Helen Robinson) in Northwest Players' stage version of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest."

"Cuckoo's Nest" opens tonight

The Northwest Players will present its stage version of Ken Kesey's "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" tonight through Saturday and April 22, 23, 24, 29 and May 1 at Gulliver's Cask n' Cleaver, above the World's Fair Restaurant in Valley River Center.

The play was adapted by Dale Wasserman (who also wrote the musical *Man of La Mancha*).

A no-host bar opens at 7:30 p.m. and the curtain rises at 8:30 p.m. Tickets are \$2.50 each and are available at the box office on the 2nd floor of the World's Fair Restaurant, the Sun Shop and Eugene Toy and Hobby downtown.

For reservations, call 484-0535.

Kesey on kids and books

Latest great notion: flip or flop?

Ed. note -

An avid reader and admirer of Ken Kesey the Writer, Candace Dempsey wonders if Kesey the Citizen might not have his white hat stuck on backwards.

By Candace Dempsey

Ken Kesey told an interviewer in 1965, "I know more about my brother's creamery than I do about the revolution."

Nevertheless, Kesey remained the darling of the disoriented, a literary guru the media consulted whenever they attempted to understand the psychedelic movement.

In a speech sponsored by the Friends of the Eugene Public Library last Wednesday, Kesey revealed how far he has come since he toured America in a Day-Glo bus and believed "everyone should be whatever they are."

Dressed in a flowered shirt and matching rust-colored pants, Kesey, 41, looked bald but not much older than when he urged his followers to go beyond acid into a new consciousness 10 years ago.

He delivered a message, however, which has been popular with parents since the three R's were invented: kids read trashy books; the best books were written hun-

dreds of years ago.

Although he was an early experimenter with hallucinogenic drugs and paid tribute to Captain Marvel in his second novel, "Sometimes a Great Notion," Kesey now deplores the popularity of drug- and fantasy-oriented literature which he described as trendy but not eternal.

"It's in to be dumb," he said, citing the popularity of "Sesame Street" and "Welcome Back Kotter" as an indication of what he called the "Earth Shoe consciousness," the belief that things are good just because they're fashionable.

Kesey said both his own novels are readily understandable and don't need to be taught in school.

Describing "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" as "a simple Christ allegory occurring in a nuthouse," he said, "I'm not a classic. I'm not in there with Moby Dick."

From a satchel, which once belonged to his father, Kesey produced the Bible and the I Ching, two classics which accompanied him "from Egypt to the moon two or three times."

Kesey neglected to include any of William Burroughs' novels among the other eternal books he listed, a surprising omission because Kesey used to describe Burroughs as the only writer to do anything new

since Shakespeare.

"New books have no sense of drama," he contended, "no uplift in the end. How could anything that hurts be the answer?"

Although he told a group of Berkeley professors in 1965 that the word "should" ought never to be used in the classroom, Kesey now admires the strict discipline of British education. He described the ideal school as a place with no discussion, no relationship between teacher and student, just a "sit-down, shut-up and read" atmosphere.

"Kids are like an open blackboard on which we should write Shakespeare and Yeats, not porno," he added.

If last week's speech is a true indicator, Kesey has come full circle — all the way from hippie prophet to concerned parent.

Perhaps Kesey, who once believed Pogo, the Beatles and marijuana were cultural necessities, has permanently wearied of bus travel and prefers farming to rock festivals.

One wonders, however, if Kesey's kids ever ask themselves, as they view the remains of that famous bus, now literally out to pasture in Pleasant Hill, "How come Dad got to have all the fun?"

be insane. I think the patients need that and yet at the same time they need the free-spirited air within themselves that McMurphy appears to have. What they end up doing is pushing the regimentation against the free spirit. The patients are the protagonists. That's why I believe that there is no small role in the show.

EMERALD: Do the Northwest Players have any future plans?

CHAMBERS: We decided to go with just one show and, based on its success, we will make future plans. We need a house. If we can get an audience and the kind of support and appreciation for our work that we're hoping for, we plan to invest every red cent we make from this show into some permanent theater equipment and a second show. We are not planning on paying ourselves or any of the participants at this point. We do want to bring in new blood and keep things going. So, if this show works we will probably pick another show that presents a difficult artistic challenge that will keep everybody working their tails off.