

Surface and Symbol

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A play about THE playwright is

A Paradise for actors, audience alike



Photo by Kevin Pope

Robinson theatre opens

Theatre goers who attend the November production of William Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life* are in for a treat. Horace Robinson, professor emeritus, for whom the University's Horace Robinson Theatre is named, is directing the play and he has assembled a cast featuring many of his former students.

The play, which runs Nov. 12, 13, 17, 18, 19 and 20, is the opening production for the newly refurbished and renovated Horace W. Robinson Theatre.

Robinson came to the University in 1933 as one member of a two-person drama department faculty. In 1946, he became director of the department and in 1949 was instrumental in designing and building the theatre addition to Villard Hall. He has directed more than 100 plays at the University and this is the second time Robinson has directed a University production of *The Time of Your Life*. The first time was in 1945.

Robinson resigned as head of the department in 1970 and retired from teaching in 1975. However, he retains his office in Villard Hall on campus and remains active in drama at the University.

"One of my former students who is in the play has been involved with drama at the University longer than I have," Robinson said.

Gerda Brown, now the office manager of a local realty company, was associated with University theatre in 1923. When Robinson came to the University in 1933, she became one of his students.

George Lauris, a professor of theatre on leave from Lane Community College who was one of Robinson's students 12 years ago, plays the lead in the production. His wife Priscilla, another former Robinson student, is also in the play.

Other former students appearing in the play include Don McNeil, now with the Eugene Chamber of Commerce, who studied under Robinson in 1940; Robert Winstead, a student during the 1930s who is now retired but operates a jewelry shop at the 5th Street Public Market; Faber DeCahine, a student in the late 1940s who is now a University professor of speech; Sandra Pearson Rennie, who studied with Robinson 25 years ago and who is now a housewife and a candidate for the Springfield City Council, and Al Phillips, a junior high school teacher who was Robinson's student 12 years ago.

At Robinson's request, the emphasis of opening night is on the play and no formal ceremony will mark the first performance in the Robinson Theatre.

An informal ceremony for Robinson will be held after the play opening night at a reception for those attending the production. Dress for opening night is semi-formal.

Renovation work on the Robinson Theatre was directed mainly to updating safety features and the lighting system, although the main lobby has also been repainted, new curtains have been hung and the chairs are newly upholstered.

Reserved seats, priced at \$3 and \$4 are on sale. Group rates are available. Robinson Theatre box office hours are noon to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and noon to 9 p.m. on production nights. Call 686-4191 for reservations.

By Cheryl Rudert
of the Emerald

There are moments when we are all caught in indecision's painful grip. The mind splits into two camps, the inner voices oppose, rage and retreat, and we are left wondering which self to believe, which path to follow.

Very Little Theatre's (VLT) opening performance tonight brings this universal dilemma to a rough-hewn stage. Instead of its normal light-hearted fare, Eugene's oldest theater company is offering a taste of the throes of maturation and self-identifying in William Gibson's *A Cry of Players*.

The play is a 'hinted-at' enactment of a brief, crucial space in the development of the eminent Bard. 'Hinted-at' means that the town setting is never really named Stratford and the characters Will and Anne never get the last names Shakespeare and Hathaway. But we recognize them through a veil of sketchy historical fact and we become acutely drawn into their conflicts both because we intimately know the outcome already and because the decisions they must come to grips with are strikingly akin to our own at some period in our lives.

"The working theme of the play here," notes director Bob Webb, "is that we do what we must." Wrapped around this tale of 'to stabilize or not to stabilize' is a delicate interweaving of one-liners that betray the playwright's craft. Gibson, best known for *The Miracle Worker*, makes the play flow in peaking waves of emotion that carry the audience on, captivated, to a final climax.

"It is a tight, well-structured script written with an amazing amount of depth for each individual character," Webb exclaims. His first play directed in Eugene, Webb enthusiastically calls *Players* an actor's paradise. There are 21 speaking roles —

each character being defined so individually that the audience grasps and retains his personality. For example, one character may be on stage for five minutes and he'll be remembered when the stage calls come around at the end of the play. Not since *Under Milk Wood* has a play given so much depth to an ensemble of actors.

Players, first produced in 1968, calls for a simple, rustic stage construction. Set in the 1580s, the dramatic effects come more from the subtleties of lighting than any more overt factor. "I rely heavily on lighting," Webb notes, "and the psychological things you can do with it. We're using a cycle-rama for the play, which is a big white screen used as a back-drop that can be lit — it's my way of tinting a statement about a mood instead of making an out and out statement."

Aside from an antiquated lightboard to work with, Webb, a recent member of VLT who came to Eugene four years ago from dusty Oklahoma, found the progress of the play smooth. "As a director I'm basically a funnel with vetoing powers. I tell the players in the beginning what the play is about and let the play evolve with them. The two lead players did a lot of outside work on their roles, leaving me to trim off the excess, so to speak."

VLT, located at 24th Avenue and Hilyard Street, is opening its doors to the public tonight at 8:15. The play will run through Saturday of this week and the 17th through the 20th of next week (Wednesday through Saturday). Tickets are \$3 and available at the box office, which will be open from 2-7 p.m. If there are any questions, call 344-7751.

A Cry of Players is a little gold mine of a play that touches on many sensitive areas. It is fast, witty and entertaining and promises not to leave you dangling. It's a fragment of history that speaks true in all of us.

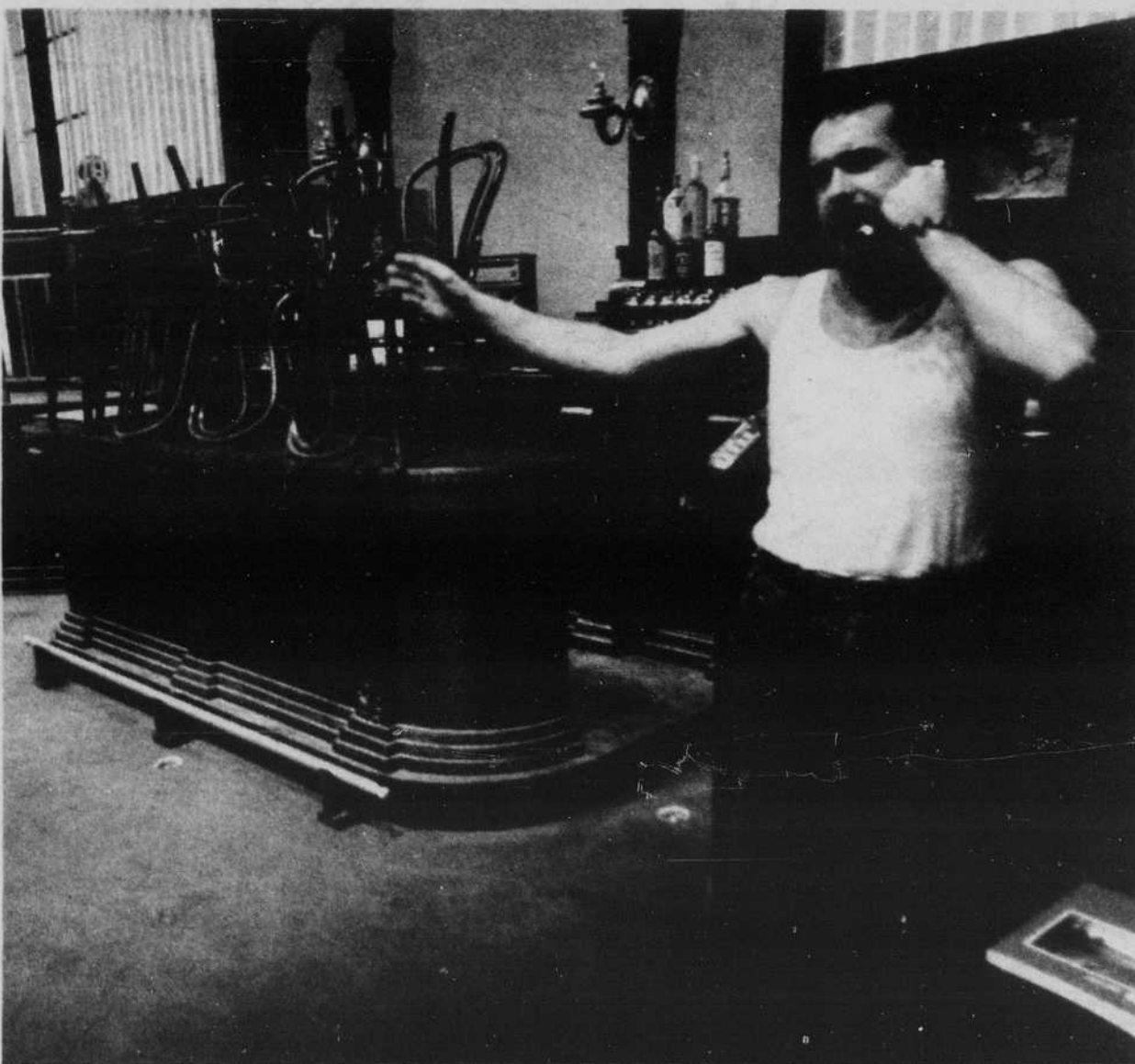


Photo by Paul Hribernick