

'Bus Stop' strikes viewer as worthwhile

By STEVEN HENEGAR
Of the Emerald

The time I've spent in small Kansas bus stops was never so pleasant as the time I spent at the Oregon Repertory Theatre's production of William Inge's "Bus Stop."

While there might have been more to it, the company's first major production in its new Atrium Theater space is well worth seeing. It runs Thursday through Sunday evenings at 8:30 p.m.

Inge's comic and sometimes poignant play, about travelers stranded in a small Kansas bus stop during a snow storm, has

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been said to be one of his best. However, the plot and characters are almost entirely predictable. This is not saying that it is a poor script, for Inge's focus wasn't on presenting a completely new story and original characters. His interest lay in the humanity of his characters.

The direction, by Andrew Traister, while generally competent and steady, occasionally undermines the humanity of the situation by undercutting the reality. At times, the emphasis seems to be on comedy itself, forcing it to the forefront rather than letting it develop through character relationships.

There are other points, however, when the humor grows naturally from character interaction. They provided fewer belly laughs, but in the end were much more enjoyable and real.

My other quibble is purely technical. While keeping several things happening at once and thus supporting the naturalness and reality of the situation, Traister then works against himself by inconsistently applying a stage convention.

I am perfectly willing to believe that several small groups together on a small acting area should be able to talk in individual groups without the others overhearing. However, when one character can hear those in the other groups, or another character conveniently overhears two across the room, I am not certain what to accept as real.

Another problem is the play's use of stereotypes (all the characters in the play). It's not that they are unreal or lack humanity (after all, what makes them stereotypes is that they embody human traits). The problem lies in that sometimes actors and directors tend to fall back on merely indicating these traits, rather than playing the characters as real people.

James Robinson designed the finely sleazied set with its battered counter and wood stove hovered over by signs advertising homemade pies and five-cent coffee. Diane Mundt's costumes were each entirely part of the character and mood, right down to the worn and slightly torn lace on the dress of the third-rate singer.

For reservations to any of the last four night's performances, call 485-1945.

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