

Reclusive

By BOB WEBB

Emily Dickinson, 19th century recluse, nature lover and writer of over 1,700 poems, only around seven of which saw publication in her lifetime, and those anonymously, will be brought to life this month. Beginning Friday night, George and Priscilla Lauris present their production of *The Belle of Amherst* at Maude I. Kerns Art Center.

Portlander William Luce wrote this play after reading all the accounts he could find on Emily Dickinson, and because of her reclusive nature they are many and often highly diverse in their opinions. It took him two years but, according to many theater-goers both in New York and here in Eugene, the effort was very much worth it.

This production of *The Belle of Amherst* was first produced last November under the auspices of Melina Neal's Entre Act Dinner Theatre at the Valley River Center.

"Melina took quite a gamble by inviting us to perform there," says actress Priscilla Lauris, who stars as Emily Dickinson. "It wasn't the usual musical or light Neil Simon-type comedy that she usually does there. But we think it paid off both financially and artistically."

The main problem with doing the show as dinner theater was the \$11 ticket price. Although actually a very reasonable price for an entire evening of food and theater, it was rather out of the range of many theater-goers. "None of our friends could afford it," says producer-director George Lauris.

Nor could many students, but this was only one of the reasons for the move to Maude Kerns. Aside from the lower price and location, thus making the produc-

tion more accessible to more people, especially students, there was one other high priority reason for reviving the play.

"This is our livelihood," says George Lauris. Both Laurises quit their teaching jobs at Lane Community College two years ago because, "We wanted to have more control over our lives." Since then they have done numerous commercials in Portland and a few industrial films. George has also participated in two films for the general public, *Sasquatch* and *Buffalo Rider*, the latter of which he served as acting director. Now, the husband-wife team is doing *The Belle of Amherst*.

The one-woman show "is a play every actress would like to try," according to Priscilla Lauris. "The play reflects the great feeling of joy in life that Dickinson had, also her very positive, witty views on living in nature. Dickinson was very much ahead of her time in her writing." Every word spoken on stage is from either Dickinson's letters or her poems.

The play concerns Dickinson's life from her early womanhood until shortly before her death in 1886. But time is not a major concern of the play so author Luce uses it rather freely, jumping back and forth to different periods in Dickinson's life in order to give weight to certain points and enhance certain juxtapositions. Although other characters are involved in the show, they are all seen through Emily Dickinson's eyes and are related to from her point of view. The way the play is set up is very similar to *Mark Twain Tonight* or *Give 'Em Hell, Harry*.

The action of *The Belle of Amherst* takes place in Dickinson's bedroom and drawing room. The tiny Maude Kerns

Hidden reflections of Dickinson emerge on Kerns stage



American poet Emily Dickinson comes to life at Maude Kerns art center beginning this Friday. The one-person production is brought to the former church by Priscilla Lauris, as Emily, and her director-husband George Lauris.

stage will be divided up by gauzy pieces of material hanging from the ceiling. This, according to director Lauris, will give things a very light and soft appearance. It should also enhance the quality of going back and forth in time.

Actually, the intimacy of the small acting area and limited seating space will probably facilitate the production in that it will tend to draw the audience closer into Emily Dickinson's world.

Howard Raney, former technical director here at the University is designing the lighting for this production.

"Actually, we originally conceived of doing the show here at Maude Kerns," says director Lauris. "This church (the art center itself is a converted church), dates from about the

same period as the play."

The Belle of Amherst plays Fridays and Saturdays at 8:30 p.m. and Sundays at 6:30 p.m. through January 29. There will also be a performance Thursday, January 26 at 8:30. The house and the wine bar will open at 7:45, 5:45 on Sundays.

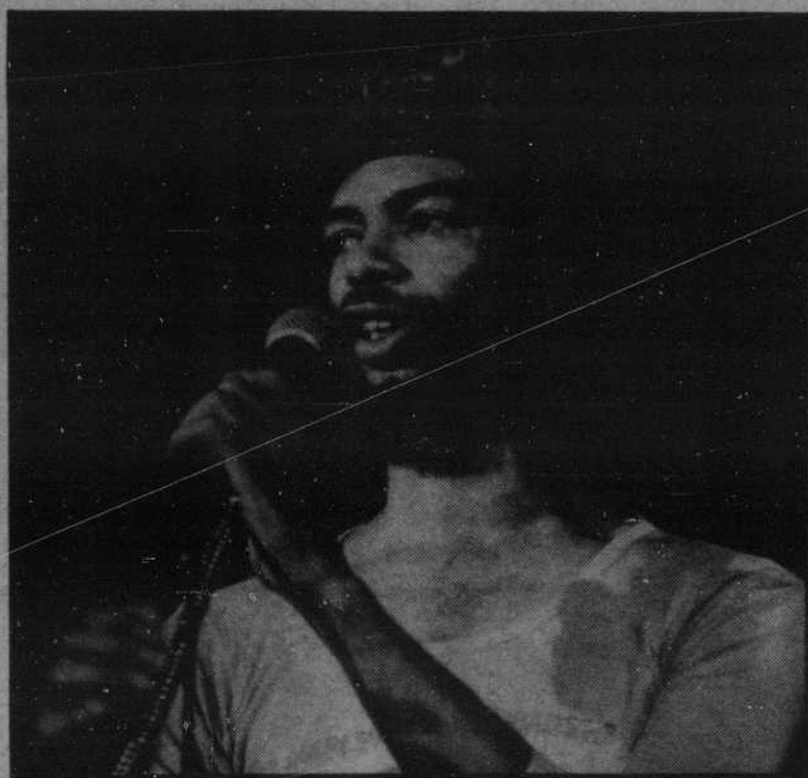
Tickets are \$4 and, as the theater will only seat around 100 people; it might be wise to purchase tickets in advance from Backstage Dancewear and Theatrical Supply, 878 Pearl St. Tickets will also be available at the door on performance nights. For reservations call 686-2671.

Lane Civic Center hosts Scott-Heron

Perhaps best known for his storyteller-like portrayal of the traditions and history of the black experience, Gil Scott-Heron is not only a performer, but also a poet and a novelist.

Scott-Heron brings his brand of poetry to the Lane County Civic Center tonight in two shows with musician/composer Brian Jackson and the Midnight Band. Opening the 7:30 and 10 p.m. shows will be Eugene's own Schwebke Brothers Band.

Tickets are \$6.50 and are available at the EMU Main Desk, the Sun Shop, Chrystalship and Everybody's Records. TDA sponsors this production at the Center, 13th Avenue and Madison Street.



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