



Elizabeth Cotten



Photos by Erich Boekelheide

Blues artist sings of death; reminisces about her life

The audience kept themselves busy sweating a reservoir at WOW Hall Friday night. The promoters had stripped the hall down to boards. And up front Elizabeth Cotten sat singing about death.

"You just as well get ready 'cause you going to die. You going to meet your lord somewhere... You just as well get ready 'cause you going' to die."

The audience clapped deferentially in response. This inspired Cotten to tell a death joke.

"One time I was walking past a cemetery," she said. "And a man walked up to me and asked 'You know how many dead bodies are

over there?' I said: "No. How would I know how many dead bodies are over there." He said, 'Why, Mrs., they're all dead.'"

The audience called it a good one. There was mutual agreement. They had a character on their hands. An antique, a kind of Will Rogers under glass. After the performance they went up to study her, and to get more words of wisdom. She'd been around enough to know how to save the rest of us some trouble.

The WOW Hall patrons were there. They had come to see a "beautiful person." They exchanged sun recipes: "Eight to

ten in the morning, that's when there's real energy; you can really mellow out then." After the performance they were going to Seattle to catch Tut. Others came too. Blues fans, senior citizens, appreciative, well-dressed matrons. The whole lump.

Cotten adopted them all, right away. "Turn up the lights," she'd say, in the middle of a performance. "I want to see my friends." The audience ate this up.

"She's old and she's friendly," explained her agent. "Easy to talk to."

"She's old and she's friendly," sang Cotten. "Going down the road feelin' bad."

British play set to premiere far from Broadway

By BOB WEBB
Of the Emerald

A Broadway play coming to Eugene? Nothing unusual about that. But a play opening in Eugene before it goes to the Great White Way, now that's news. That's what's happening the next two weeks in the Pocket Theatre, Villard Hall.

The play *The Crunch*, by Marcus Campbell, a young New Zealand playwright now living in London, will be performed by professional British actor John Rainer.

Why Eugene? "I met some of your University people in England," said Rainer, referring to a recent educational tour of theater in Great Britain by University Theatre students, "and decided that if the climate and space allowed, the University community would be a good place to try it out."

He wanted to play before United States' audiences and see the west coast. This is his first visit here.

Due to the play's somewhat controversial subject matter, Rainer felt he would have a guaranteed audience if he performed in San Francisco or Los Angeles, but he didn't want only one sort of audience. Hence, another reason for the premiere to be in Eugene: the University community offers a theatrically-conscious and, presumably, more open-minded audience.

And what is the controversial

subject matter? *The Crunch* examines the dilemma of a transsexual, Rainer said. "This man has passed as a woman for nine years, but hasn't had the operation because he is afraid. It examines his lifestyle in a funny/sad way."

What we see on stage are the events leading up to the moment when "the pressures become too much — when it comes down to the crunch."

Rainer stresses that he's not interested in pushing any issues. The play does not advocate any point of view although it does "raise some questions," not only on the subject of transsexuality, but on any sexual variation.

It may even cause some people to "rethink their situation." But the main reason Rainer is interested in presenting the play is the challenge it provides for him as an actor, and Rainer considers *The Crunch* to be a very good play by

one of England's most promising new playwrights.

Rainer trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London and has had an extensive career in regional theater all over England.

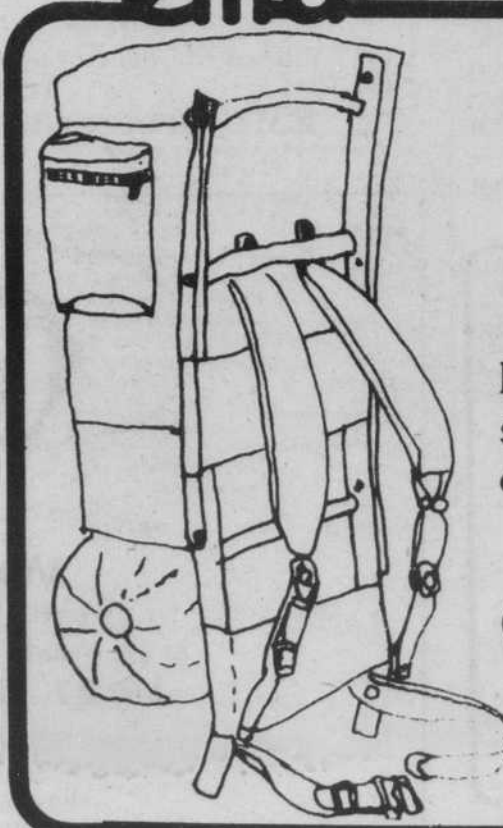
Some of the highlights of his career include appearances with Sir Ralph Richardson's Haymarket Theatre Royal Company in *The Rivals* and *The Merchant of*

Venice; many television credits for the BBC and independent commercial stations; a Swiss Curtain Rail advertisement which was awarded the Funniest Commercial of the Year by Punch Magazine; it was also a prizewinner in its class at the Cannes Festival. His films include roles in the Burton/Taylor *Under Milk Wood*, by Dylan Thomas, and in Oliver Reed's *The Carry Cot*. He has also

had the honor of appearing in a Royal Command Performance before Queen Elizabeth.

Tickets for *The Crunch* are \$3 and may be purchased at the Eugene Hotel or at the door. Performances are scheduled for tonight through Saturday and next Monday through Saturday at 11 p.m. According to Rainer, "it's the only time we could get the theatre."

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