

The Oregon Repertory Theatre's production of *Tobacco Road* is somewhat like a mattress: good and solid yet nice and bouncy, with a slight sag in the middle.

The first act was a delight. Fast-paced and powerful, the first act was hilarious as the cast stretched humorous segments out to their fullest potential and then closed them gracefully as a ballet dancer landing from a jump.

It was a shame that the second act couldn't quite reach the high standards set in the first act. The pacing slackened, the cast lost its earlier spirit, and as a result, much of the scene's tension was crippled.

After the intermission, however, the cast found its second wind and proceeded to deliver a finale so powerful that the audience was bowled over in its wake.

Tobacco Road is the story of a dirt-poor farming family in the rural tobacco country of Georgia. After generations of tobacco farming has exhausted the land, the Lester family barely scratches out a living during the hard years of the Depression.

Douglas Schroeder and Priscilla Lauris turn in excellent performances as the lazy, thieving Jeeter Lester and his whining wife Ada. After the first fifteen (or so) of their children have married and left their tum-

ble-down shack, they are faced with the possibility of losing their home and field and getting sucked into the industrial life of the big city.

It wouldn't be difficult for such a scenario to lead to a dry, depressing story, but director David Lunney and his high-powered cast turn the play into a triumph.

Will Shindler is fantastic as Ada and Jeeter's snotty teenager Dude. He shows open contempt for his folks, yet does so with enough style to keep from alienating the audience.

The "Casting Call of the Year" Award should be given to

whoever cast old-timer Bud Winstead as Grandma Lester. There was a ripple of laughter in the auditorium when he enters and the audience realizes that Grandma's really a he.

Winstead is amazing. Without speaking a word he creates a truly memorable character who is easy for the audience to like and the Lester family to kick aside. Indeed, when Grandma disappears out in the fields, Jeeter says he'll have to go looking for her — "one of these days."

The cast is all so talented, it's hard to pick favorites. Rebecca Proctor is wonderful as Ellie

May, the daughter with a cleft palate and a healthy desire for males.

Jody McCoy is perfect as Sister Bessie Rice, a home-styled evangelist who claps her hands to get God's attention when she prays for the Lesters, who she reckons are "jest about the most powerful bunch a sinners in the world."

Watch for more from Alan Rosenberg, who plays the role

of Lov Bensey with the confidence and vitality of Bruce Springsteen. With his facial expressions and powerful stage presence, he provides much of the force needed to carry off a production such as this.

The technical side of the production is as good as the acting. The set builders somehow constructed a shack that looks convincingly old and
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'Wind' revival a University treat

If the Carnival Theatre's revival of *Inherit The Wind* is anything like its summer show, University audiences are in for a real treat this weekend.

Inherit The Wind is the story of the clash between two legal heavyweights — Matthew Harrison Brady (Tom Lasswell) and Henry Drummond (Bob Friedman) — in a legal battle over the teaching of evolution in public schools.

The play, written by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, is based on the Scopes trial, where Williams Jennings Bryan and Henry Drummond met head-on in a similar case.

There is far more to the play, however, than the legal battle. Relationships between characters and the right of an individual to think become central issues of the play.

Director Grant McKernie and his cast have done an exceptional job in bringing the past to life. Lasswell is incredibly powerful as he rages in righteous fury against "evil-lootion" while Friedman wryly pokes fun at the bias of the town and the unwillingness of the townspeople to examine the ideas of "this Charlie Darwin fella."

Although their characters compete with each other, the players never do. Lasswell and Friedman play off each other in a way that brings out the best in both.

Many of the other members of the cast also shine. Jerry Walker, who plays the overzealous Reverend Jeremiah Brown, puts in a phenomenal performance as he rants and raves as only a southern preacher can. His energy and delivery are as intense as the audience can handle.

Robert Barton, in the role of journalist E. K. Hornbeck, provides a fine balance of power and humor as he matches his cynical barbs with perfect timing. His eloquence is surpassed only by his ego as he hog-ties the townspeople with ropes of words.

The University Theatre is presenting "*Inherit the Wind*" for two nights only Friday and Saturday at the Robinson Theatre. Tickets are \$4.50 for the general public, \$2.75 for University students and senior citizens, and \$3.50 for other students. For reservations and ticket information, call the box office at 686-4191 between noon and 4 p.m.

By Matt Meyer

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