

Mamet's 'The Woods;' an ORT bore

By Jonathan Seigle
Of the Emerald

ORT is to be praised for bringing new theater to Eugene. Yet their selection of David Mamet's "The Woods" is a bust. It's just not a good play.

Time was that a playwright had to go to New York for exposure. Thanks to regional theaters in such places as Providence, Louisville, or Minneapolis, new writers are paying their dues and gaining acceptance outside saturated New York. Nowhere is this more evident than Chicago where a whole slew of talented playwrights are making it a real theater town. Leading them is David Mamet.

"The Woods," however, is not Mamet's best. It's not even Mamet's good. It's trite, shallow, and worst of all boring.

Two very uninteresting people leave the city for a deep country tryst. The potential is there for tough theater. Two people with little to do but talk. A writer's delight. But Ruth and Nicholas are far from delightful.

It's an actors play. With no real action to distract, each word, each speech must be carefully conceived. It's all the cast has to do: talk. Yet it's painfully obvious from the very beginning that director Robert Webb and his cast do not understand this.

The show begins with Webb delivering a brief description of what the audience is to expect. What sort of show needs that? He concludes with a question, "What is it that makes relationships work?" It's clear that he believes this relationship is somehow normal, that the answer to his question will be revealed before the show is over. It's not.

Nicholas is selfish, insecure, and immature. He wants the world on his terms. When he doesn't get it, he meows like a whipped dog. Ruth is more believable. She's sentimental and loving. She's willing to overlook Nicky's faults because she believes she loves him. But she's more in love with the idea than with Nick. What kind of woman could love such a pasty little twerp? Neither are very attractive.

The idea of making a love story out of unattractive people is intriguing. Paddy Chayevsky made unattractive Marty memorable. Mamet's script is not memorable, it's painful.

Nevertheless, even a bad script can be saved by creative and dramatic staging. However, Webb's direction is flat, and the acting uninspired.

Sue Schroeder as Ruth has some excellent moments. She understands a

woman's dilemma, loving a man no one else could. She has spirit and energy. She's at her best when she's emotional, but when she is not, it's clear she's acting. ORT's intimate surroundings make it difficult for an actor to show such seams. At times I wasn't sure whether Schroeder was Ruth or not.

Bill Reid is thoroughly unbelievable as Nick. He says "I come up here and I see things," but he doesn't. A fish jumped, he exclaims, but he hasn't seen it. Nicholas is supposed to be turned in, but Reid carries it so far he's a turn off.

This is not a show to see, especially if you love new theater. At one point Nicholas asks "What're we doing here? We can't know ourselves." Too true. I thought the same thing myself.

ORT has done better and is sure to do better.

But this is not good work.

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