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distractions

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Theater diehards hang tough

Sometimes, when the established forms no longer function, when the outlets are stopped up, when the machine loses its drive, it behooves those who were directly involved with keeping the wheels turning to seek new venues for their talents and abilities. One can't re-invent the wheel, but one can attach it to another vehicle.

Such is the case with the actors, directors, and technicians involved with the Oregon Repertory Theater (ORT). When that company closed its doors last fall, several of Eugene's professional artists found themselves out on the street. Many of those people made their living doing theater.

Story by Robert Webb
Photo by Erich Boekelheide

Lamentably, many left Eugene to find work in their chosen fields elsewhere. They left gaps which may be felt for years to come.

Many others, however, have taken to heart what could be called the Eugene edict, to wit: roll your own.

Artists who wish to survive and practice their respective crafts are by nature a rather resilient lot. If a bridge collapses, one builds another.

One such construction was erected at The Brass Rail, 4th Avenue and Willamette Street, when On the

Edge performed there last fall, not two months after the locks were put on ORT's doors.

On the Edge is a small group of actors, musicians and comedians, all of whom have worked with ORT. They perform original sketches, songs, and improvisational routines, usually of a satirical and/or somewhat offbeat nature.

Past sketches have involved characters such as Santa Claus (both before and after the Christmas rush), Frantic Fran (the bag lady who always tells it like it is), Wheatgerm (a hippy social commentator and songwriter extraordinaire), Marlin Perkins and his sidekick Jim (who talk funny) examining the mating habits of various flora and fauna (who speak for themselves), and others too numerous to mention.

A large part of an On the Edge performance consists of improvisational work, wherein the company asks for

suggestions from the audience and builds routines around them, a different show every night.

On the Edge will perform again at The Brass Rail on April 28-30, May 5-7 and 12-14. Tickets are \$3. Be advised that the last show sold out its original three-week run and was held over for another three weeks, which also sold out. The Brass Rail can only seat 50-60 people, depending on the configuration needed for a particular show. Calling 342-2298 for reservations is a very good idea.

On the Edge was the first show ever done at The Brass Rail and owner Lloyd McKinlay was impressed. So much so that he let it be known via the theatrical grapevine that his place was open to other performance possibilities.

According to McKinlay, "I always wanted to own my own business, one that would be something different, and would provide something you

couldn't get anywhere else. The cabaret theater really provides that for me. It's an experience you can't get anywhere else in Eugene."

"Lloyd has graciously opened his doors to us," says actress Rebecca Proctor, "which allows us to offer good theater at an affordable price in a comfortable atmosphere."

Proctor is an ORT alum who is involved with the next play to be hosted by The Brass Rail. That next play is "The Public Eye," by Peter Shaffer, produced by the Cascade Balzac Company.

The play is "a light Peter Sellers-style comedy of character and situation," according to John Duncan, actor, co-producer and University English teacher. It concerns an older husband (played by co-producer Don Scorby) who suspects his much younger wife (Proctor) of being unfaithful. He hires a detective (Duncan) to check up on her. But the detective develops an interest in the situation which goes beyond the usually-accepted professional parameters of his work and begins mixing and manipulating the events into a mad-cap maelstrom of comedic confusion.

"The Public Eye" opens Thursday and plays Friday and Saturday as well as April 14-16 and 21-23. Showtime is 9 p.m., and tickets are \$2.50. Again, the number to call for reservations is 342-2298.

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Horace Robinson is more than a big name in University Theater; he is University Theater. Jonathan Siegle looks at the man who almost single-handedly created the University's dramatic arts program.