

University Theatre production opens tonight

'Romeo' composer tries for romantic style

In 1980, Johnathan Mansfield was cast as "Greta," a drag queen who owned a cabaret in Germany during World War II, in the University Theatre production of "Bent."

According to Mansfield, the script called for Greta to sing a song. "But," he says, "there was no music provided, so I talked to the director, Bob Barton, and said, 'Why don't I just write something?'"

Mansfield says he recorded a piano accompaniment for himself, and it worked out so well that he and Barton decided to extend the project. Mansfield then wrote and recorded the incidental music for the entire show — "a series of little piano pieces, real simple, basic stuff."

Since then, Mansfield, now 22, has composed break and incidental music for University productions of "Dracula,"

the award-winning original play "Excursion Fare," and currently, "Romeo and Juliet," which opens this evening at Robinson Theatre and will continue its run for three consecutive weekends. He also was instrumental in composing the music for many of the pieces in "The Last Dragon," and has served as musical director or accompanist for several other University community productions.

Mansfield says that "Dragon" was a turning point for him in his music. "I began to feel that I was finding a little niche for myself (as a musician in the theater department)," he says. "About that time I started really pursuing music seriously and blowing off a lot of my other classes... not blowing off, really, but realizing that I was much more interested in music and theater than studying literature or economics, or whatever."

With "Dracula," Mansfield started experimenting with what he calls "incidental music" — musical interludes that underscore the action and dialogue during the play.

Mansfield says that since "Dracula" is in the tradition of "19th century romanticism, as far as the theater style goes," he had the opportunity to work with a style of music that was "romantic, but in a 20th century sense."

"That's one of the approaches I've taken to the music for 'Romeo and Juliet,'" he says, adding, "It's not romantic in the sense of Beethoven or Tchaikovsky, but it's kind of my approach to romanticism."

Mansfield claims as his influences such diverse artists and composers as J. S. Bach, Phillip Glass, Steve Reich, Laurie Anderson, Steven Sonheim, Ber-

nard Herman and The Talking Heads. "Most of the contemporary people that I admire have a real theatrical sense" to both the composition and the performance of their music, says Mansfield.

A native of Medford, Mansfield moved to Eugene in 1980. He says that he is looking forward to moving on and composing music for productions in other markets. Someday, he says, he might like to compose film scores and other types of music.

But he's happy where he is, too. "I want to be able to learn as much as I can from a place like Eugene, and there's still a lot of things I can learn here... a lot of things."

For more information on "Romeo and Juliet," call 686-4191.

By Marty Schwarzbauer

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