

Blues
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THE Friday EDITION

Oregon daily emerald

arts and entertainment

Friday, November 6, 1985

On a chilly November night while everyone else was gearing up for the coming holidays, the cast and crew of "The Madwoman of Chaillot" were in the final stages of preparation for opening night.

"Madwoman," which opened last night in the Robinson Theatre, is a good, old-fashioned melodrama, filled with ample spectacle, villains, eccentricity, and love to engage any audience member.

At rehearsal before opening, the cast paraded onstage in front of Director Grant McKernie and costume designers Sandy Bonds and Nancy Julian. Amidst chuckles and concerns, decisions were made about the various costumes and how they reflected the characters' personalities.

There was no curtain to signal the onset of the play or mysteriously hide the stagehands who dress the stage. The actors whisked onto the set as set pieces were flown in from above and pushed in from the wings. Lots of excitement abounded and everything was extremely busy.

Watching this process feels more like watching an actual theatrical presentation, or a magical circus, rather than real life.

The show is filled with lots of visual and aural spectacle, music, explosions, thunder, singing, dancing and juggling.

The script, written by Jean Giraudoux, deals with the struggle between good and evil, and how a band of hungry moneymakers are going to tear up Paris to satisfy their lust for oil and wealth. Countess Auriela, the Madwoman of Chaillot, is determined to rid the world of all evil and ugliness. She believes the world is a happy, beautiful place, and if it's not, she can make it happen in the course of an afternoon.

Although Giraudoux wrote the script in the '40s, McKernie, who is head of the University speech department, chose to make the play more contemporary. He says that this will universalize the action by making it not appear as if it could only happen in the '40s.

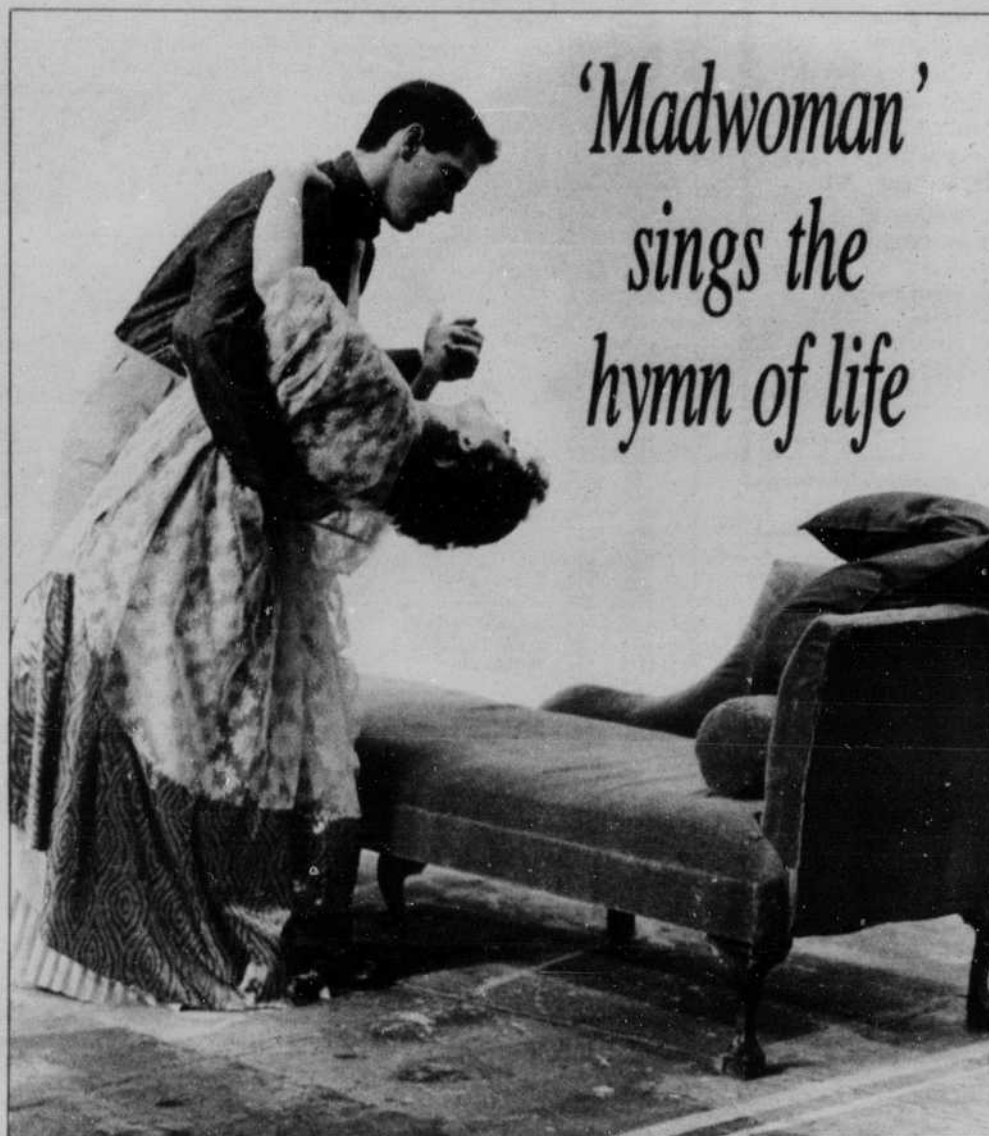
Giraudoux, who was a French diplomat, spent his days in meetings trying to rid the world of the evils that occurred in the '40s. Being unsuccessful in that pursuit, he would come home at night and write fantasies.

"Most of his plays sing a hymn to life, most of them are very affirmational. They're affirmational about human nature," McKernie says. "The hymn of life being ordinary people doing ordinary things."

McKernie says he identifies with Giraudoux's definition of good as "being free to express yourself and your own sense of eccentricity and to allow yourself to be who you want to be."

The characters of the play are a wide assortment of ordinary people. They range from the innocent to the extreme eccentric. Countess Auriela is one of those extreme individuals who has a tendency to live in the past, when the world was bright and beautiful. She never recovered from a past love, and tends to pour forth all her love on the people around her. Matchmaking and cats are her greatest passions in life.

Julian, a veteran Eugene-area actress, portrays the Countess. "She's so joyful, so happy, it's infectious," Julian says of



(above) Pierre, played by Trever Cartwright, waltzes with the "Madwoman," played by Nancy Julian. (below) Director Grant McKernie gives the cast pointers during a rehearsal prior to the opening of "Madwoman of Chaillot" last night in Robinson Theatre.

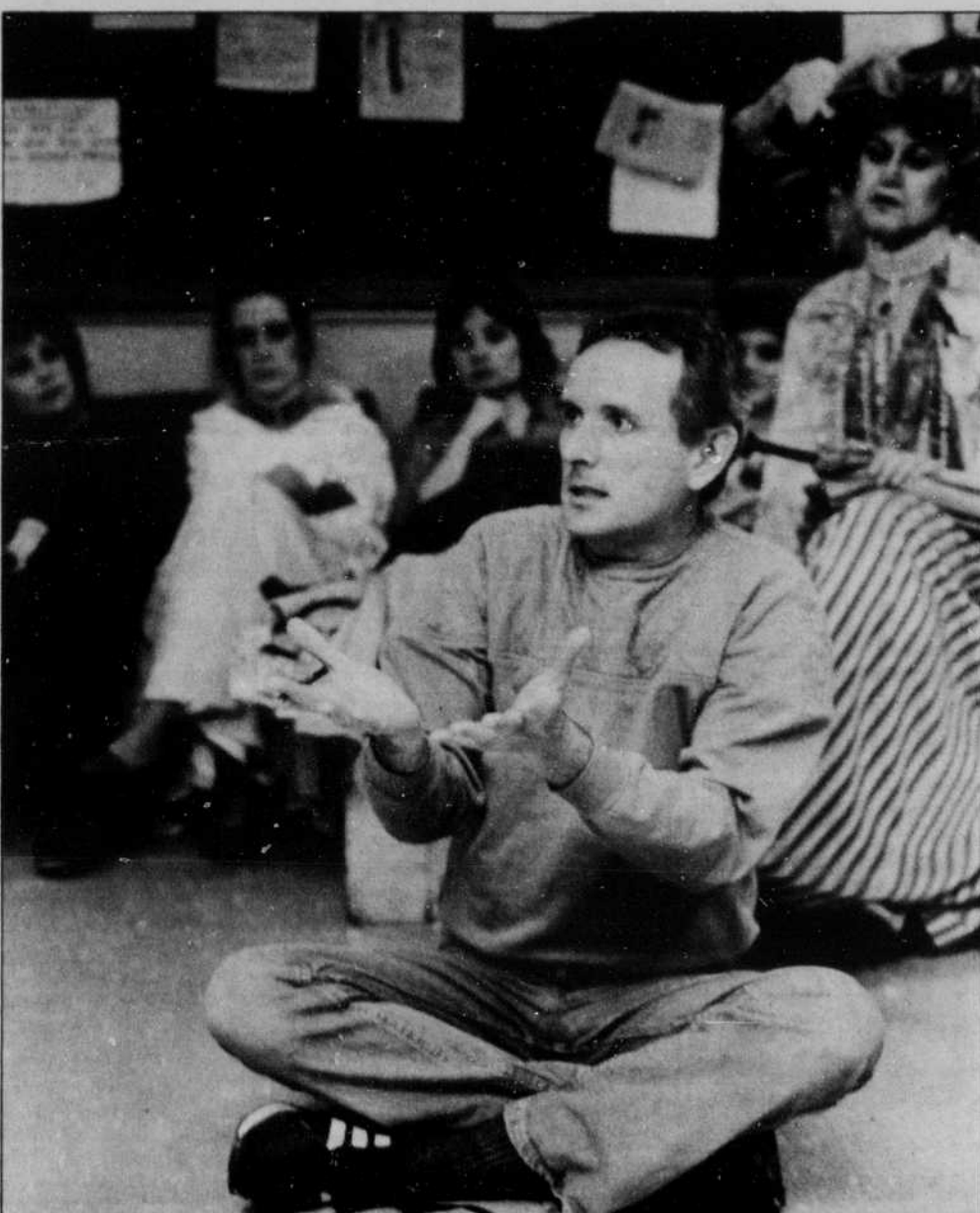


Photo by Steven Wall

ner character. "I like her immensely. I think she's a wonderful person with an amazing amount to give to the world. I enjoy that feeling through her, it's really gratifying."

The main villain of the show is the President, played by theatre arts major Stan Freitag. "My character can't stand her (the Countess) or any of her little friends; they're just so stupid," says Freitag. "There's something about them he would like to exterminate." Filled with venom and hate for mankind, the President provides a balanced complement to the Countess Auriela.

Carol Nagle, a University graduate student in costume design, designed costumes for the four madwomen. "The madwomen are sort of in their own era; they're sort of not-period, eclectic, all period," Nagle explains. "They've made their choices from a number of periods as opposed to the street people that live in 1985."

Their costumes reflect a romantic, nebulous, eccentric feeling. "Lots of layers in the mauves and pinks, sort of dusty, rosy romantic and yet sort of arty," Nagle says. "They look like they've been picked out by a little old lady who couldn't see real well and they are just slightly off and don't quite match."

As for the rest of the cast, Bonds and Julian have designed costumes using ideas from European fashion magazines and clothing they saw on the street people in Europe during past vacations. Julian recently spent a month in England, and Bonds went on sabbatical last year in Europe for a term.

David Shaw, University Theater technical director, designed the lights for the show, and David Apple, University graduate student in scenic design, designed the set. The main set piece is a stairwell which revolves manually.

"Any time you have to build a seven and one-half foot self-supporting platform that has to roll quickly, it's always an engineering problem, but it was fun to build," Apple says.

The production feels magical, even down to the scene changes themselves. "Grant wanted very much to have all the scene changes happen in full view of the audience so the audience could see them, and that's kind of fun," Apple says. "When I go to a play, I love to see how they do the scene changes. (In) big Broadway musicals now, they never close the curtains; all the scene changes happen as if by magic."

McKernie decided on "The Madwoman of Chaillot" for the University Theater's second production of the 1985-86 season because he believes "it is a play that deals with eccentricity and love and it says that the way to be a human being in this world is to be yourself and to be an individual."

"The majority would rather just become what in the play are in essence called dead people, people who wonder around and have no insides at all, and do what they are supposed to do."

Stage Manager Nancy Larson says she hopes Giraudoux' hymn to life hopefully will leave a question in everyone's mind in the end: "Who's really mad? Maybe in their madness they've got a wisdom and knowledge that the rest of us don't have."

Performances are scheduled for Dec. 6-7 and 12-14. Curtain time is 8 p.m. and tickets are \$3.50 for University students with I.D. and \$4.50 for general public.

By Diana Taylor