

New theater to offer drama, foreign films

By Don Peters
Emerald Associate Editor

The Eugene cultural scene has a new place to view amateur theater productions and international films.

Willamette Street Theater, 1045 Willamette St. opens its doors to the general public Feb. 22-23 with a grand opening that will feature current exhibitions as well as a taste of things to come.

The theater is a project of Mainstage Theater Company, a 10-year-old, non-profit acting troupe in Eugene.

"(Mainstage) needed to have one place where plays come out of," said Margo Schaefer, publicist for Willamette Street Theater. "The chances to produce (amateur) plays in Eugene is limited."

Willamette Street will be run by Jim Roberts, executive director, and Steve Bove, general manager, who both have long-time ties to the area. Sixteen years ago, Bove opened Cinema 7: the first international theater in Eugene. When that closed two years ago, he moved to the Mercury Theater in Springfield.

Roberts' experience includes directing many productions for Mainstage.

Opening a theater "has been a separately held dream of Roberts and Bove for a number of years," Schaefer said. "But we've pretty much only been working on it for the past two years."

The first stage was finding a suitable building. The need for high ceilings — among other things — eliminated many of the buildings the group looked at. But when the Wilson Building, former site of J. Cole's Brew Pub, opened up, Schaefer said the search was over.

"(Roberts and Bove) looked at many buildings," she said. "When this opened up, we knew it was absolutely perfect."

The front part of the building is the Cabaret Gallery, which will be used for meetings and the like. The back part, still under construction, will contain a 130-seat theater.

Schaefer said everything will be in place for the Feb. 22 opening, which begins at 7 p.m. A champagne or non-alcoholic bubbly toast will kick off the celebration, followed by live music. On Friday, the guitar and violin combo of Jorge Navarro and Greg Roberts will play, while Saturday's show features the brass quartet "Unstuck in Time."

On both days, after the music, Mainstage will present

scenes from its production of *Sweeney Todd*, followed by Jean la Renoir's film *The French Can-Can*. Cost of the opening is \$20.

Careful planning has gone into making Willamette Street Theater a possibility, but Schaefer said public support is needed to keep it alive.

"This is a tenuous proposition at best," she said. "We have great managers, but we need community support."

"The theater audience in Eugene exists, but we need to expand it," Schaefer added. "We'll provide an opportunity for the local talent pool to perform."

After the grand opening, Willamette Street will settle into a normal routine. First will be an international film festival, featuring 16 works from 13 different countries. A sneak preview will be held Wednesday, Feb. 27 and costs \$7.50. The show is scheduled to run Feb. 28 through March 28.

After that, Mainstage will present Studs Terkel's *Working*. Dates for the play have not yet been finalized.

In addition, the theater plans to hold a number of special programs. One of them is "Late Night Live," an adult comedy show every Friday and Saturday at 11 p.m., beginning March 8-9 with the comedy group "Live Matinee."

For the younger set, Willamette Street will hold two Saturday performances (11 a.m. and 2 p.m.) of "Theater to Play With." The first run of eight plays goes from March 16-23.

General ticket prices are \$6, with a student discount rate of \$5 Sunday through Thursday and \$5.50 Friday-Saturday. For more information or tickets, call 683-4368.

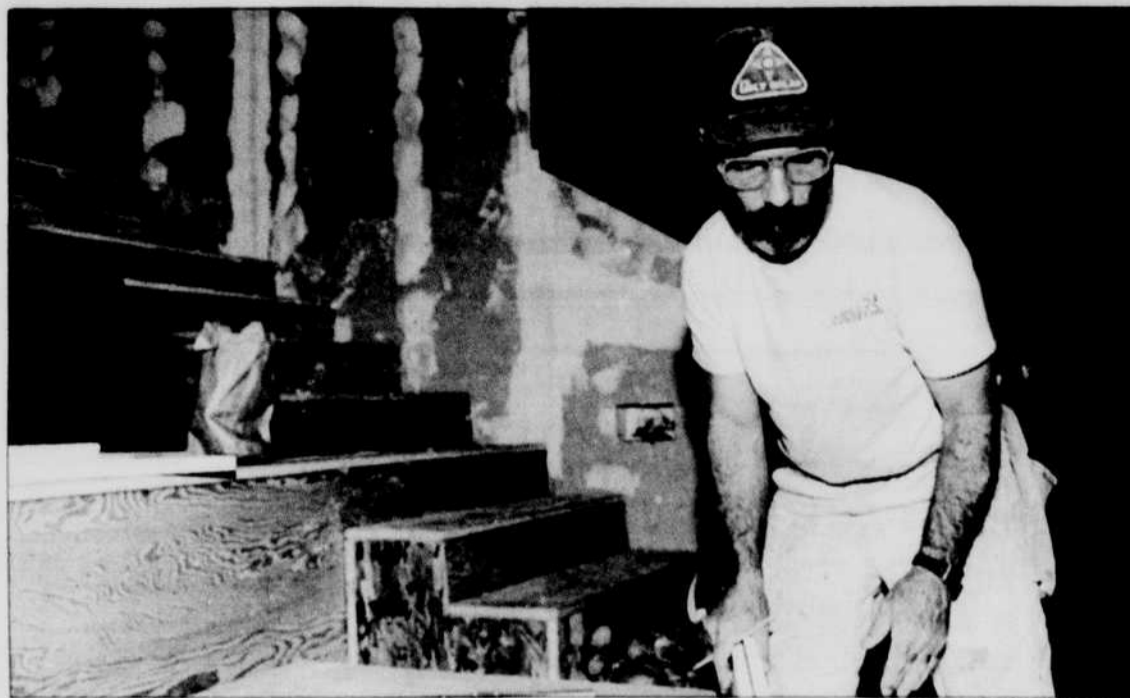


Photo by Andre Ranieri

Pete LaVelle works on the Willamette Street Theater, a theater opening in Eugene that will offer amateur theater productions and international films. When the theater opens he will be the folk music concert coordinator.



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