

Lord Leebrick adds to Eugene theater scene

By Tim Neff
Emerald Associate Editor

The Eugene drama scene, known more for its light-hearted musicals than for dark existential plays, is about to experience a plot twist.

When drama aficionados turned out in late June for The Lord Leebrick Theatre Company's debut performances, they saw a type of production that has been conspicuously absent from Eugene venues for the past five years — shadowy plots with disturbing messages.

Behind the push for dark theater in Eugene are two recent graduates of the University of California at Irvine drama department. Randy Lord and Chris Leebrick hope their brand of serious drama will fill a void in the local theater scene.

"Right now in Eugene there are no theater groups that do serious theater, like dramas and avant-garde plays," Leebrick said. "We're interested in theater that is on the edge."

To that end, The Lord Leebrick Theater Company's first offerings were two contemporary one-act plays with strong political and existential themes. The Harold Pinter play "One for the Road" explored governmental power abuse, while "Play" by Samuel Beckett provided a disquieting portrayal of the hereafter.

Lord said all the performances nearly sold-out, which has done much to quell initial jitters.

"We were nervous because we're the new theater group in town," Lord said. "We had no audience base, so it was hard to judge how we would be received. But the first one went well and we're hoping to build on that."

Choosing the Pinter and Beckett pieces was both an ar-

tistic and an economical decision.

Leebrick said the plays fit well into his theater company's mission to produce serious drama.

"With the kind of theater we're interested in starting, we do want to turn some heads," he said. "We're interested in doing intense theater."

When the Oregon Repertory Theater was still producing plays, Eugene drama hounds had a place to turn for serious drama. But when the group went under in 1987, no one picked up the torch.

"A lot of Eugene groups do musicals and light drama — plays that are a little more safe," Leebrick said. "In Eugene, with the political climate the way it is, we feel that this town would support a theater that was a little more on-edge."

Kim Donahey, who was one of the three actors in "Play," said the darkness of the piece presented unique acting challenges. She played the role of a disembodied soul remembering her traumatic life experiences and unaware of the presence of two of her former companions.

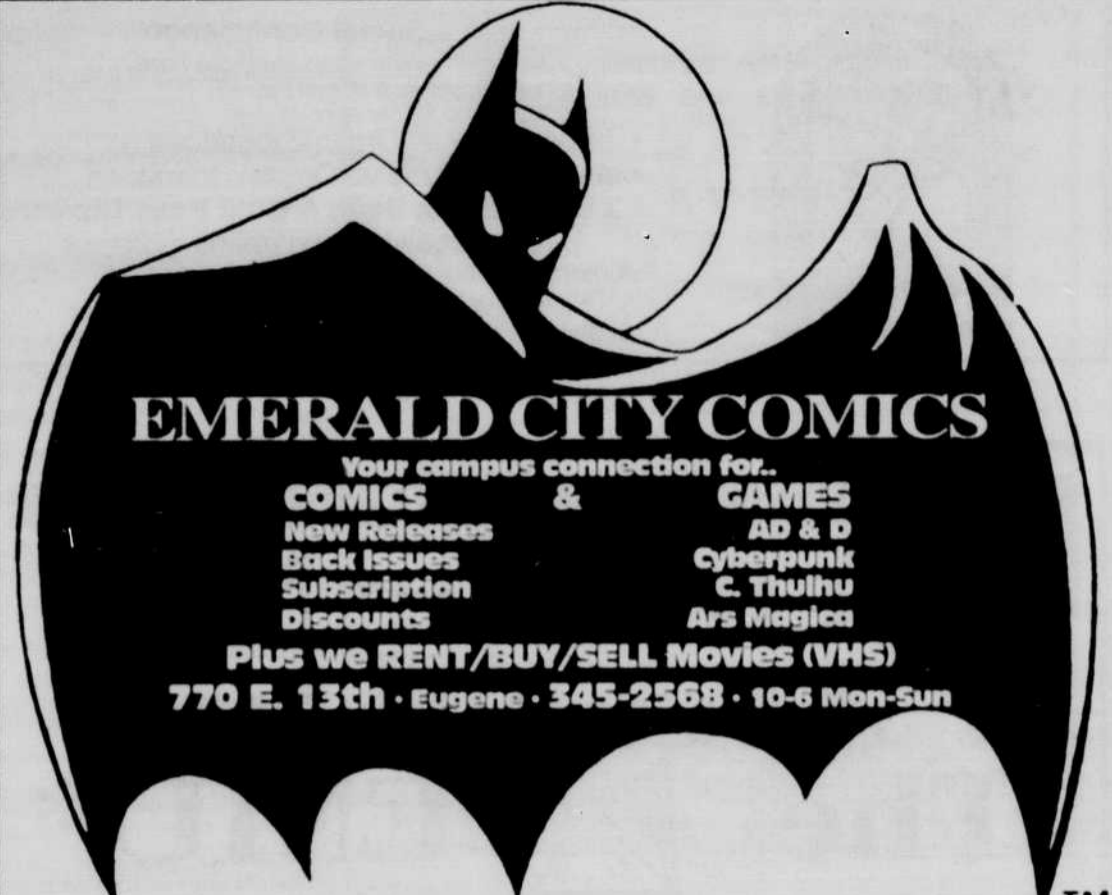
"It's very intense," Donahey said. "I've studied acting at the University, and the talk is about the relationship between the characters on stage. But in 'Play' they aren't relating."

Artistic considerations aside, the one-act plays made good economic sense.

Leebrick said the theater group has gone to great lengths to keep costs down by constructing "skeleton sets" that rely more on the audience's imagination than on elaborate set design.

"The skeleton set is one way in which you save money, but we don't want to always be lim-

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