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Curtain Call:

'T-Bone' for the dogs

By D. Lee Williams Emerald Contributor

T-Bone N Weasel is a bi-chromatic

The play, showing March 5 and 6 in the Arena Theater, tracks the exploits of two escaped Southern convicts, one white, one black. Director Grant McKernie calls the show "farcical" yet also a "genuine exploration of serious social

So it is - at least on paper - a come-



Left to right: Davon Russell asT-Bone, Jon Egging as Weasel and Richard Egan as a derelict in 'T Bone N Weasel,' a University theater production.

dy-drama. But McKernie's production is barely funny and hardly dramatic. A drama never rises. night spent with this limp play is like a luckless night spent with an impotent 80

year-old: The comedy falls flat and the

But don't blame the actors. That T-Bone N Weasel is able to produce even

These inane, initial sit-com-like scenes are supposed to propel the mapless plot, which, in Act II, continues winding around like a drunken driver downtown, hitting all of Eugene's annoying, gonowhere one-ways.

the least amount of laughter is, in fact, due more to the actors' frenetic blind faith in their roles than to any offstage direction or truly funny dialogue.

And, since all roles are cliches in this

play, no one in the cast seems to have trouble going overboard in his characterization: Jon Egging as the wiry, white Weasel gives his role a wild work-out; Richard Egan, playing a doctor, a derelict, and a down-home Southern whore, and Andrew Bauer as a cop, a car-salesman, and a stuttering sweepstakes-winner are both superb stage chameleons. Davon Russell as T-Bone is medium-well.

But all acting efforts are sadly academic. The cast is trapped in a sinkboat of a

story, with no visible plot-line to pull them to safety. Under the guise of being a frolicky, anti-hero road-trip, author Jon Klein flashes these scenes at us, all in Act I: a fumbled liquor store robbery, a gun-ditch and a gun-search and breathlessly brief encounters with the first act's round of tired-old Southern stereotypes.

These inane, initial sit-com-like scenes are supposed to propel the mapless plot, which, in Act II, continues winding around like a drunken driver downtown, hitting all of Eugene's annoying, go-nowhere one-ways. Exactly midway, T-Bone - who's smart enough to have a plan by now - senses that

Turn to T-BONE, Page 8







Brenda Wong Aoki, acclaimed storyteller and Kabuki/Noh (traditional Japanese) theater artist.

Storytelling Sorcery

they would find a voice in Brenda Wong Aoki, a sorceress of storytelling whose tales awaken ancient

Tales of spirits past and present will prevail when Aoki presents her latest collection of stories in "OBAKE!" (oh-bah'-kay), which means "ghost" in

She adapts three of her "Obake" stories - "Black Hair," "Havoc in Heaven" and "The Bell of Dojoji" from ancient Chinese and Japanese fables.

Aoki transforms into an arrogant husband, a loving wife and a venomous, wealthy woman in "Black Hair," a tale of a man who discovers he can't regain the wonderful wife he left for a world of unhappy

A generous and loving girl refuses to acknowledge the rejection of a Buddhist monk she loves in "The Bell of Dojoji." Instead, she pursues him and transforms into a snake. Aoki calls this a Japanese version of "Women Who Love Too Much."

"Havoc in Heaven" provides comic relief between

more haunting tales. Aoki plays the famous Monkey King, who tricks death and the gods and eats so much that he groans from the complete overdose of his lower chakra.

With "Dancing in California," Aoki turns from ancient fables to WWII California, where a Japanese-American ballerina's career is shattered when she is forced into a "relocation" camp.

Aoki performs on a bare stage with only her Japanese Noh fan (used to portray a sake cup, a tray and other props), a short rod and her long hair. She carves woods, castles, animals and spirits out of thin air with a few simple twists of her fingers and expresive face.
"I do traditional Kabuki/Noh drama from the per-

spective of a woman, a completely different perspective than the traditional style presents," Aoki said. "This is, in fact, the most unique thing about my stories. They unfold from a personal point of view rather than from the universal.

Aoki's energetic blend of modern dance with traditional Japanese Noh and Kyogen theater, spiced with some western vocal techniques, earned her a reputa-

poppi's

inatolia

tion as the star of the 1988 Northwest Storytelling Festival. Aoki's debut album, Dreams and Illusions: Tales of the Pacific Rim, won the National Association of Independent Record Distributors best spoken words album of 1990.

"In Western theatrical technique, the actor tends to speak in terms of developing a character," Aoki said.
"In Noh/Kyogen, we search for the hana or essence of the character, assuming that a character exists by and of itself, and all we have to do is find it."

Yet she found that as a person of color, the only performing roles she could get were as maids, prostitutes and cooks, she said. So she began creating her own solo theater works, gaining recognition across the country as a leader in developing art forms that express the experience of the growing Asian-American population. Aoki won a NEA Solo Theater Fel-

Aoki performs in the Hult Center's Soreng Theatre March 9 and 10 at 7:30 p.m.

Turn to STORYTELLING, Page 8





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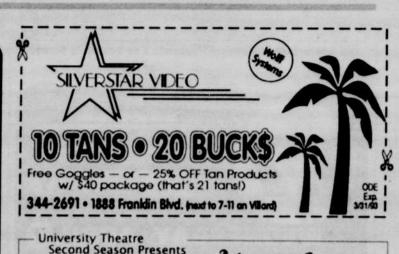
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