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Theater group taps into healing game

Theater of Liberation will host a workshop and two performances in the EMU's Walnut Room this weekend

By Amy Boytz
Oregon Daily Emerald

Sometimes it seems like everyone and everything is out to get you. You feel bogged down and oppressed with commitments to school, work and relationships. This weekend, that could all change.

Theater of Liberation, an interactive theater aimed at resolving conflicts and oppression, will host a workshop and two performances at the University. Facilitated by Marc Weinblatt of the Seattle Public Theater, these programs teach theater techniques that help participants express and resolve their conflicts through acting.

"There are all different things really going on in any interaction, like thoughts, feelings, emotions and inner voices," Weinblatt said.

Theater of Liberation is based on the Theater of the Oppressed, which was founded by Augusto Boal in the 1960s. Weinblatt has used variations of Boal's theater techniques for eight years. Both use acting and the help of others to resolve conflicts.

"It is a practical, tangible rehearsal for the future," Weinblatt said.

In the workshops and performances, participants will act out an expression of their oppressions. The audience is then allowed to stop the action, step in to replace the protagonist and attempt to resolve the conflict. This process can continue indefinitely until it is resolved.

"You watch a scene when someone is feeling victimized and you say, 'That's hopeless,'" said Alicia Swaringen, associate director of TAPRoOT, the Eugene organization that is co-sponsoring the event.

"And yet by stopping the scene and switching actors with someone who has a different idea, and watching how everything changes, it magically opens the field of possibility,"

Participants in the weekend-long workshop will explore different acting games and techniques, culminating in the two performances Friday and Sunday night.

Friday's 8 p.m. performance, "The Rainbow of Desire," lets audience members climb onstage to illustrate their oppressions using human sculpture and improvisational acting techniques. Typical themes include racism, sexism, environmental issues and authority issues. The actors then resolve their oppressions through physical exercises and theater games.

Sunday's 7 p.m. performance, "Theater of Liberation," features conflicts illustrated by members

of the workshop, though the event is open to the public to view. During this performance, participants act out their oppressions and audience members are invited to resolve the scene.

Though the workshop focuses on acting, Weinblatt said it is not necessary to be an actor to participate.

"It's designed for non-actors. It's more about just being authentic," he said.

The workshop typically appeals to actors, political activists, therapists and anyone else interested in finding solutions to oppression, Swaringen said. Students in particular can benefit from the techniques.

The project appeals to "anybody interested in stretching themselves a bit more and coming away with some new options for how they deal with the challenges in their life," Swaringen said.

"I think a lot of us get stuck when we feel like something is happening that's not supporting us. ... [Theater of Liberation] gives you new doors to walk through as far as how you deal with these kinds of challenges."

Though these techniques are especially helpful for resolving immediate concerns, Swaringen said, they can be applied elsewhere.

"As people become more familiar with these tools, the capacity for using them is almost endless," she said.

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Bands perk up the Buzz Thursday night

Four local solo sets performed at The Buzz Coffeehouse in the EMU

Serena Markstrom
for the Emerald

Four artists with a unique connection entertained about 50 people at the new Buzz Coffeehouse in the EMU on Thursday night.

Aaron Mason, Eric Larson, Lael Alderman and Ezra Holbrook performed some solo works to the mostly student crowd.

All four are also members of other bands. Mason and Larson are with the American Girls, and Holbrook in Alderman's band, Lael Alderman.

Fans had a chance to sample songs the artists don't typically cover in their usual shows, such as more personal songs during an acoustic solo session.

"There are the songs I play with the band, then there are the songs I play alone in my room; these are the songs I play in my room," Larson said.

Cari Cunningham, who organized the event, said she wanted to bring the bands together so more people could see the artists' rare relationships and talents.

"They are friends, musicians and they support each other's shows," Cunningham said.

She added that it is not unusual to see them play in each other's bands as guests or even jump on stage when another is performing.

Holbrook echoed Cunningham.

"In a situation where you normally have a lot of competition, we all legitimately want each other to succeed," Holbrook said. "We try to help each other do it."

These bands, along with other

local bands such as Drive, have created a musical community in which they support each other.

But there is no shortage of producers to single out the talents they have helped each other create.

Alderman said major record companies are interested in each musician. The American Girls have signed with Sony.

Alderman signed with Geffen records and is due to record a new album in the spring. Holbrook, formerly of Jacob Marley's Ghost, was signed to a label but has opted to produce his own album for more musical freedom.

Tonight fans of all ages can catch the American Girls at the WOW Hall. The performance will start about 11 p.m. Holbrook will perform with Drive at John Henry's at 9 p.m.

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