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Eugene gets a taste of Texas with 'Tuna'

Four actors portray a town full of characters in "A Tuna Christmas"

By Thomas C. Sloop
 for The Emerald

Students seeking refuge from academic or holiday stress can venture to the Actors Cabaret of Eugene for a momentary segue into live theater.

The troupe presents its debut of "A Tuna Christmas" on Saturday. The holiday comedy, directed by Joe Zingo and produced by Jim Roberts, is set in the mythical town of Tuna, Texas, as four men play the entire population of the town during the Christmas season.

"It's going to be a lot of fun," Roberts said. "The play pokes fun at just about everything."

"A Tuna Christmas" invites students and families to stop, relax and laugh together during the holiday season. The play's themes are subtle in the least and are often at times very adult-oriented.

"This will be the show that people will enjoy the most out of any of the shows in town," Roberts said.

The production features the acting talents of Barry Shaw, Don Kelley, Merlin Whitehawk and Tyler Miller. Each actor will divide his time with the others to act out the roles of more than 20 characters. The characterization in the play is diverse, and assuming the roles of at least four different characters a piece is a difficult task.

But the actors' primary concern is not the acting itself, but rather their ability to remain collectively focused on stage and resist any temptation to burst out in laughter.

"It's hysterical," Miller said. "The quality of the script is spectacular. It's written as such that if you just spoke the lines it's funny."

Whitehawk described the production as "a wacky comedy," written by Jaston Williams, Joe Sears and Ed Howard.

"Students or anyone else will be very impressed with the quality of the script and the quality of the acting," Whitehawk added.

The play is only two acts but has been arranged to run more than two hours of live comedic theater. The stage dominates the main floor, but almost one hundred patrons can fill the venue to capacity. Theatergoers can also enjoy dinner and drinks with friends or family.

"There is something in it for everyone, for people of all ages," Miller said. "It's just pure fun."

The cabaret houses an eclectic atmosphere. Roberts said more than 100 people are involved from many different backgrounds for each production, especially in releasing "A Tuna Christmas."

"The play will really be wonderful," Roberts said. "This particular production is a new one, so we can offer the actors and people in the community something that they have never seen before."

"A Tuna Christmas" shows how far the Actors Cabaret of Eugene has progressed since the venue opened 20 years ago. "A Tuna Christmas" will be the capstone of the 1998 theatrical season in conjunction with the anticipated "The Rocky Horror Show" on New Year's Eve.

"I can't imagine another show that you'll laugh harder at," Miller said. "You'll never laugh your ass off more."

The play opens Saturday and plays Dec. 10-12, 17-19 at 8 p.m. and Dec. 13 at 2 p.m. Tickets are available at the Actors Cabaret of Eugene by calling 683-4368 between 11a.m and 3 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday.

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