

For whom the Bells Toll

A Portland area duo brings the unusual artform of handbell music to life in a Eugene performance

By Sara Jarrett
Oregon Daily Emerald

Being likened to synchronized swimmers without the water has come as no surprise to Beth Klein and David Jordan. After all, to successfully play handbells, one must be able to move as efficiently as possible.

Even though mastering the craft doesn't necessarily require a connection between each performer's movements, the two musicians who collectively make up Handbells Unlimited! spend a significant amount of their rehearsal time choreographing just that, Jordan says.

The Portland-based duo makes an appearance in Eugene Saturday night at Central Lutheran Church, 1857 Potter St.

The reasoning to perfect matching rhythms isn't so obvious to the casual observer, Jordan says.

During a performance, "43 mini versions of the Liberty Bell," rest on a table, he says. The bells sit atop a three-inch piece of rubber Styrofoam, with the hard, plastic handle facing away from the audience. The bells' "lips" gaze outward.

Arranged like the keys of a piano, each bell produces a different tone. With only two people playing the instruments, the action can get very dynamic on stage.

Imagine what might happen to inexperienced bell players with little spatial awareness.

Jordan and Klein, however, have everything under control with Handbells Unlimited! With 31 years of experience between the pair, they initially began the company because they had outgrown the more conventional 63-bell choir of 12 to 15 people.

Their chosen path has been challenging from the get-go, but success has been its own reward, Jordan says. They could, no doubt, make a living as street performers if things were to suddenly get real tough.

After debuting in 1998, Handbells Unlimited! took an 11-day tour to Minnesota and back, during which the duo performed eight concerts and held two workshops. In addition to performing in Seattle, Portland and Alaska, the couple has also broken into the international circuit, performing in Germany and Scandinavia.

Though there are quite a few soloists, a duet handbell team is very rare, Jordan says. He knows of only one other, in Southern California where he grew up before attending the University of Oregon.

While working on a computer science degree — he graduated in 1996 — Jordan even taught a few handbell-ringing classes at the School of Music as well as playing with the University Concert Choir.

Now he uses his talent to complement his career as a computer programmer in Portland.

An arguably obscure instrument, the handbell doesn't get a lot of press. When observers see it in action, however, especially a duet team, they are usually impressed.

"I wonder, 'How can they do all that?' The two of them make it look so easy," says Gail Rapp, a fellow bell player who met both Klein and Jordan in a community bell choir in Portland.

"I love watching them," she comments. "They look like twins sometimes."

Proud of their musical range, Jordan describes their concerts as very eclectic, with the tunes ranging from Bach to "music written a couple of years ago."

In their repertoire, for instance, is "Fat Man On Roof," a revised adaptation written by Klein of the holiday classic



David Jordan and Beth Klein offer a unique chance this weekend to hear handbell music. Courtesy of Handbells Unlimited

"Up on the Housetop."

A lot of the music they play, however, was originally written for the harpsichord, which translates nicely to handbells, Jordan says.

Hear Handbells Unlimited! play its music Saturday at Central Lutheran Church. The concert begins at 7:30 p.m. Admission is free with an optional donation to cover travel expenses.

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'Lonely Planet' full of emotion

Lord Leebrick Theatre Company and HIV Alliance join forces to bring a message of courage to the community

By Windy Borman
for the Emerald

The newest production by the Lord Leebrick Theatre Company is "Lonely Planet," which opens tonight. The play by Steven Dietz stars Randy Lord, owner of LLTC, and Joseph Gilg of the University Theatre. Carol Horne directs the story, which explores issues dealing with AIDS by examining the friendship between two gay men.

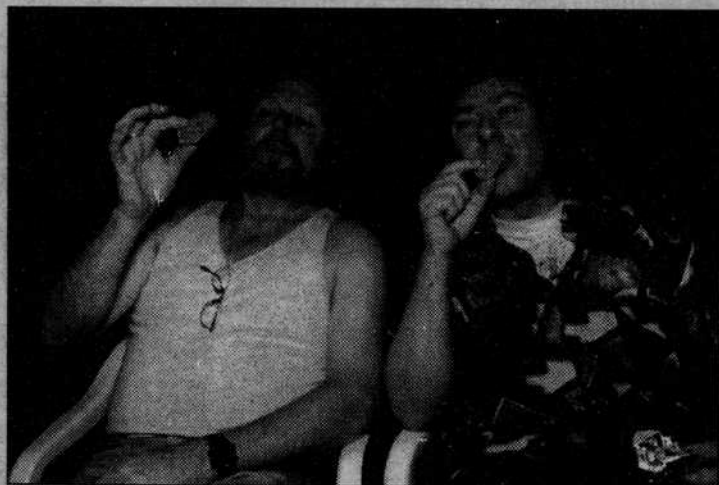
The play shows "how friendship gets us through the darkest times of life," Horne says. "It's the

ability to reach out to our friends that gives us the courage to step back into life."

Reaching out to the community has also become a priority for the local non-profit theater company.

The Lord Leebrick Theatre has agreed to donate 15 percent of all "Lonely Planet" ticket proceeds to benefit the HIV Alliance. The group is a non-profit organization that has served the people and community of Lane County since the 1980s.

The theater also invites community involvement by hosting casu-



Joseph Gilg (left) and Randy Lord star as two friends who help each other through the emotional experience of dealing with HIV and AIDS. Courtesy of Lord Leebrick Theatre Company

al talk-back discussions after each Thursday and Sunday performances of "Lonely Planet." Representatives from HIV Alliance will be present to talk to audiences about the play, answer questions and spread recent news about HIV.

This play looks at AIDS differently than we do today because it was written in the early 1990s, says Darnell Rudd Mandelblatt, HIV Alliance development director. She says she wants people to understand that "HIV is not over and the word 'AIDS' does not mean life is over."

The subject matter does have the potential to be dismal, but Gilg vouches that the script and acting are not overemotional.

"The play is intelligent and deals with emotion, but doesn't get maudlin or depressing," he says.

While tissues remain optional, they are still recommended.

"Lonely Planet" begins its run tonight and continues until Feb. 12 at Lord Leebrick Theatre, 540 Charnelton St. Performances begin at 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and Sunday matinees begin at 2 p.m.

Tickets are \$15 for Friday and Saturday performances and \$14 on Thursday and Sunday.

For more information contact the Lord Leebrick Theatre Company at 465-1506 or the HIV Alliance at 342-5088.

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