

Great Expectations

University Theatre's 50th anniversary

■ The department has put all of its energy into a mammoth production of a critically-acclaimed play

By Joe Walsh

Oregon Daily Emerald

It's not easy to recreate a man's life story in one theater production.

But that's exactly what the University Theatre Department is doing for the next three weeks, beginning with tonight's performance of "The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby."

The production of "Nicholas Nickleby," a play based on the novel by Charles Dickens, caps a year-long celebration of the 50th anniversary season of theater productions at the University's Robinson Theatre. The enormous scope of the production — which contains 140 named characters, requires three directors and runs in two three-hour parts — is a fitting tribute to the theater's golden anniversary.

"We were looking for a project that would involve everyone in the program and that would be much bigger and grander than anything we've done before," said University Theatre's development director Joseph Gilg, "and we narrowed it down to 'Nicholas Nickleby' fairly quickly."

Although the story — which chronicles the life of a virtuous young man in Victorian England — takes six hours to tell, Gilg said he prefers not to focus on the length of the show. That tends to turn off audiences right away, he said.

"I liken it to a good novel — the kind that you can't wait to read the next chapter," Gilg said. "The story is put together in that way. It's so engrossing that as an audience member it just sort of draws

The naked truth about the crew behind the 'Nickleby' costumes

While most people at "Nicholas Nickleby" will be focused on the acting, they might not realize that the performances are the culmination of almost a year's work for the costume crew.

University theater arts professor Alexandra Bonds started researching "Nicholas Nickleby" last June by reading the original novel and the script for the play, and watching the movie and researching the dress of that time period.

Afterwards, she roughed out costume de-

signs and began fittings in January.

"We've been going full speed since then," she said.

Bonds heads the costume crew, which includes 45 University students who costume upwards of 140 named characters in the play. And that doesn't even include costumes for the crowd scenes, which boost the total number of costumes to almost 200.

Many of the costumes came from the University theater department, though some were borrowed from the local Willamette

Repertory Theater or culled from national costume searches.

Some of the costumes were also made by students in one of the theater department's costume construction classes, Bonds said. Students learned advanced sewing techniques and applied their skills to constructing parts of costumes.

"It's great that the curriculum coincides with the play," Bonds said. "That way, the students get to learn two things at once."

— Jessica Blanchard

you in."

Since its 1980 premiere as a theater production, the prodigious "Nicholas Nickleby" has received equally grand praise. It won the Tony Award and the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award for 1981 and was hailed as one of the greatest theatrical triumphs of the 20th century. But because of its demands on a theater's resources, the play is not often mounted or seen.

While the University Theatre has done large productions in the past, "Nicholas Nickleby" is the largest in 20 years, said UO professor of costume design Alexandra Bonds in a press release. And while the play's 32-member cast is not any larger than many of the musicals presented over the years, the fact that most of the actors present four to six characters each is remarkable.

"It's in fact doing two plays at once," Gilg said, "and even though we regularly do that, we don't regularly do it with the same people. That's where the challenge comes in."

Besides the logistical challenges of casting, organizing rehearsals and determining which actors would wear which costumes in which scenes, the department also had to create count-

less props and costumes. With as many as 70 different locations and more than 150 characters, including the unnamed crowds of people in the streets of London and elsewhere, the department had its hands full.

Senior instructor and University Theatre designer Janet Rose faced the challenge of creating those 70 different scenes all on one set that could be transformed to the various locales by the use of different props and characters.

"Even though we're doing a massive show, Robinson Theatre didn't get any bigger," Rose said.

Rose, who is also organizing the lighting for the play, said she will use approximately 200 lighting cues throughout the show. An average production uses closer to 60, she said.

Preparing for the overwhelming play was a long and tedious process that began in the winter of 1999 when the department chose "Nicholas Nickleby" as the single production that would involve everyone in the department. After months of preparation and with the opening performance right around the corner, everyone involved is ready to go.

"What we're looking forward to at this point is the moment we get

the audience in," Gilg said. "They're going to see a delightful story. I just think that all the energy is going to be real infectious with our audience."

Part one of "Nicholas Nickleby" opens tonight at Robinson Theatre in Villard Hall with part two following on Friday, May 19. Part one will be performed on Thursday evenings, May 18, 25, and June 1; at Saturday matinees, May 20, 27, June 3; and at a Sunday matinee on May 21. Part two will be presented on Friday and Saturday evenings, May 19-20, 26-27 and June 2-3 with a Sunday matinee on May 28. Curtain times are 7 p.m. for all evening performances and 1 p.m. for all matinees.

Tickets for "Nicholas Nickleby" are available at the Hult Center and the EMU ticket office. Tickets are \$10 for the general public; \$8 for senior citizens, faculty and staff; and \$5 for UO students with a \$1 discount for Thursday performances. Patrons will need separate tickets for each part of the production.

Proceeds from tickets sold by the Community Internship Program for the May 21 matinee will benefit that program. For more information, call 346-4351.

Letter laments long distance dilemma

Dear Harlan,

My boyfriend and I went out for 10 months before I left to study here in the states. We have had a long distance relationship ever since. We recently had our 1 year and 7 month anniversary.

When I left we had talked about staying together, but that we could see other people. That never happened, and we decided to be monogamous. I was able to go visit him during winter break and he came over during Easter. And it was great.

But now he wants to do the "open to other relationships thing" and I don't anymore. I agreed to it before because we did not know how things were going to be, or if we were going to be able to talk. Yet things have worked fine and we talk every day. Now, I don't want to be with anyone else. He says he loves me and does not want to break up, but he does not have me there and it is hard on him to not do anything (sexual) with anyone when I am not there.

He just wants to play around just to fool around, but still have me as a girlfriend.

Still, I know it's going to hurt the day he tells me about other girls and I don't know if I want to

be his girlfriend while he goes out with other girls. I am so confused and don't know what to do! I love him, and he has been faithful for eight months of distance, but I don't know if I can deal with this. Yet I don't want to ruin everything...please help!

— Delirious over the distance

Dear Delirious:

It's just so "(insert expletive) stupid" when two people in love can't be together because of long distance.

The only way these distance things work out is with trust. If you're always thinking he's out messing around with some other girl when you can't get in touch with him you'll never want to touch him again. If you're going to be together forever you need to be in this thing together. If you need a monogamous relationship and he's not willing to provide it, he might not be the guy for you.

Not being with other partners is part of being in a relationship. If he can't deal with it he shouldn't be in this thing. Random sex is meaningless. The longing to be with you physically is part of this thing. This is part of loving from afar. It's not easy. It sucks at times.

It takes work. If he can't meet



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Harlan

adult relationship.

Express your feelings and see what he has to say. Maybe, one of you can relocate sooner than planned. If he can't commit and you need him to commit, this thing is only going to slowly deteriorate. I only hope love will conquer all...

Dear Harlan:

I was really hurt by a guy, but he didn't really know he hurt me. He is only after sex and sees it as a game. I find it more emotional and something that should be shared with someone in a relationship.

Well, I did something bad, and I got really hurt by it. I still like this guy a lot, but I know he doesn't like me. I've never told him

his sexual needs alone he needs to visit you more often or get creative. If he can't handle it maybe he needs a break. That's what it means to be in an

how I feel, but I need advice on if I should tell him or not. Should I tell him how much he hurt me and how much I like him?

I have not spoken to him in over a week, but I'm not really sure how things are between us. I just want to be with him, but I know he's not ready to tie down. So what should I do?

— To tell or not to tell

Dear to tell:

If you need to talk to him, make sure you stand far enough away, so he can't reach out and undo any of your buttons. That would be something bad.

You know what he's all about and what he's after so do your best to stay away from him. Clearly, you need someone who understands you and won't take advantage and hurt you. Tell him what you need to tell him, but know that he can't give you what you want and need. There are plenty of guys who share your feelings. Don't do something bad with someone bad. It will only make you feel bad.

Harlan is not a licensed psychologist, therapist or physician, but he is a licensed driver. Write Harlan online at: www.helpmeharlan.com. All letters submitted become the property of the column.

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