

# Local theater group gives Shakespeare a go

■ The mistaken-identity humor of 'Comedy of Errors' comes to the Hult Center

By Mason West  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Eugene's Willamette Repertory Theater breaks new company ground Friday with its first Shakespeare production, "The Comedy of Errors." The production celebrates not only the company's first stab at Shakespeare, but what is possibly Shakespeare's first stab at writing.

The decision to perform the show was made by company founder Kirk Boyd. He explained that it is impossible to confirm the play as Shakespeare's first because of confusion over the history of Shakespeare's writing. However, it is certainly one of his early works. Director Dan Kremer pointed to the simple structure of the play as evidence.

"The Comedy of Errors" revolves around two sets of identical twins who are separated at birth. The Antipholus twins are of the merchant class and the Dromio twins are their servants. By chance, the master and servant twins from Syracuse have come to the town of Ephesus, where the other twins reside. The play then unfolds on the driving forces of coincidence and mistaken identity.

Kremer said the dialogue of the play also suggests Shakespeare's young writing, with the use of many rhymed couplets. The lyrical game that the lines wind around the audience emphasizes the play-

ful nature of the work. Independent of the simple language and plot, which is based on a Roman comedy by Plautus, Kremer said the play has the same depth of character as any of Shakespeare's other works.

Casting characters is always difficult when working with a script containing twin roles. But Boyd had the decision made for him when at a party he realized that he had two actors of identical build. He immediately thought of "The Comedy of Errors," because the works of Shakespeare are never too far from his mind; Boyd worked with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland for 17 years.

"When I came up here, I swore that I wouldn't do Shakespeare," he said. "But I just can't not do it."

From the first decision to do the play, the cast was gradually assembled from both local and equity actors. The Willamette Repertory Theater is the only theater company in Eugene that has a contract with Actors Equity, meaning that it is easier for the company to import talent from out of the area to combine with local talent.

"It allows the community to see actors that they know in a venue that raises the bar on quality," Boyd said.

Two University graduates, Sabrina Bernasconi and Megan Smith, made the quality cut and appear as (respectively) Courtesan/First Merchant and Adriana, Antipholus' wife.

The cast plays out the script in exotic costumes that are a mesh of modern fashion, with skirts and



Courtesy From top left, Jeff Pierce, Stephen Massott, Patrick Torelle and Achilles Massahos play two sets of twins who were separated at birth in the Willamette Repertory Theatre's presentation of Shakespeare's 'The Comedy of Errors.'

sports coats, and Arabian dress, with turbans and robes. These choices were Kremer's attempt to create a fantasy world for the play to live in.

"As soon as you define a time and place, you put into the audience's mind a certain amount of political and geographical bag-

gage," he said. "This play isn't about politics; it is about people's interactions."

Sparky Roberts, who plays the Abbess, said that the play has been placed in many different settings, including the deep South and even in a circus clown show. But the ungrounded approach that is taken by

this interpretation gives more credit to the play than other devices.

The play runs Jan. 26-27 and Feb. 2-3 and 9-10 at 8 p.m., Feb. 1 and 8 at 7:30 p.m., and Feb. 4 and 11 at 2 p.m. in the Soreng Theater in the Hult Center. Tickets are \$12 to \$30 and are available by phone at 682-5000.

# 'Crouching Tiger' leaps into audience's imagination

■ Chow Yun-Fat's latest kung fu epic blends incredible cinematography with a gripping story



'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon'

Sony Pictures Classics

★★★★★

By Lisa R. Griffing  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Incredible kung fu skills, quixotic tension and the story of a lost young woman struggling to be true to herself draw viewers to Ang Lee's "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." Lee (no, not Spike Lee's brother) directed the insightful film.

The cinematography is reason enough to see this movie. The lush landscapes and views of ancient China comprise the backdrop for this subtitled masterpiece. But the plot is even better.

"Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" delivers an entertaining, emotional roller coaster. The acting, imagery and storyline create a magical romance set in feudal China.

Two people in love, Li Mu Bai (Chow Yun-Fat) and Yu Shu Lien (Michelle Yeoh) join together in this kung fu epic to retrieve a stolen sword. The sword thief, Jen Yu (Ziyi Zhang), desires to marry the man she loves and live an adventurous lifestyle. This longing is complicated because Jen is at the mercy of a social tradition that allows her parents to pick her match. Jen's bitterness causes her to lose track of her virtues, and her scandalous cravings for karate action and the resulting inner conflict constantly supply suspense.

Much of the dialogue sounds like a modern version of Confucianism, which makes each character seem mysterious and intriguing. Li Mu Bai is a disciplined, wise warrior whose perfect timing adds to the rich dialogue. His love and equal in combat skills, Yu Shu Lien, contradicts tradition. Though she is wise,

perceptive, courageous and forgiving, her warrior ways guide her into a solitary, daring lifestyle.

These two fighters weave in and out of each other's lives, which provides exciting tension. They chase Jen's master, Jade Fox (Pei-peï Cheng), whose name speaks for her character. Fox is the notorious warrior from Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien's past.

Jen, though, is the most perplexing character in the movie. Jen's warrior skills and passion to break free from Chinese cultural standards corrupt her. The character development may be rapid, but it never allows a single dull moment.

Although "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" could be mistaken for a contemporary Bruce Lee film, the action did not detract from the emotional drama. Despite the fact that kung fu is displayed in 75 percent of the movie, there is little graphic violence.

Various musical themes heighten the flying kicks, tantalizing dialogue and beautiful scenery. The score was light and airy in mo-



Courtesy Sony Ang Lee's kung-fu epic, 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon,' premieres at the Bijou Feb. 2.

ments, but don't let that fool you. The instruments suddenly climax and wham! — an intensified reaction. The effective series of shifting moods produces excitement.

The fantasy of performing martial arts while soaring over buildings and sailing through trees

make this a Chinese "Matrix" without the high-tech gear. It must be seen a few times in order to soak in the depth. "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" is superb.

The movie premieres in Eugene on Feb. 2, at Bijou Art Cinemas on East 13th Avenue.

feather your hair  
turn up your collar  
splash on some Polo  
and head back to the time  
when Reagan was King

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