

# REVIEWS

PULSE EDITOR: REBECCA WILSON

## 'True West' a true winner in Pocket Playhouse

■ This story of the dynamic between two brothers covers emotional ground that shouldn't be missed



Pocket Playhouse 'True West'

★★★★☆

By Mason West  
Oregon Daily Emerald

If you have ever wondered how much damage a 5-iron can do to a typewriter, you cannot miss the Pocket Playhouse show this week. There is more destruction in this show than in any other production I have seen in my campus career. But this play offers much more than a display of the basic male desire to beat things.

Sam Shepard's "True West" tells a story of two brothers: one a screenwriter, the other a wandering thief. Austin, the writer, has just started house sitting for his mother at her home outside Los Angeles. His brother, Lee, comes out of the desert, where he has been living for some time and, like the brash, abusive friend that we all have known, invites himself to stay as well.

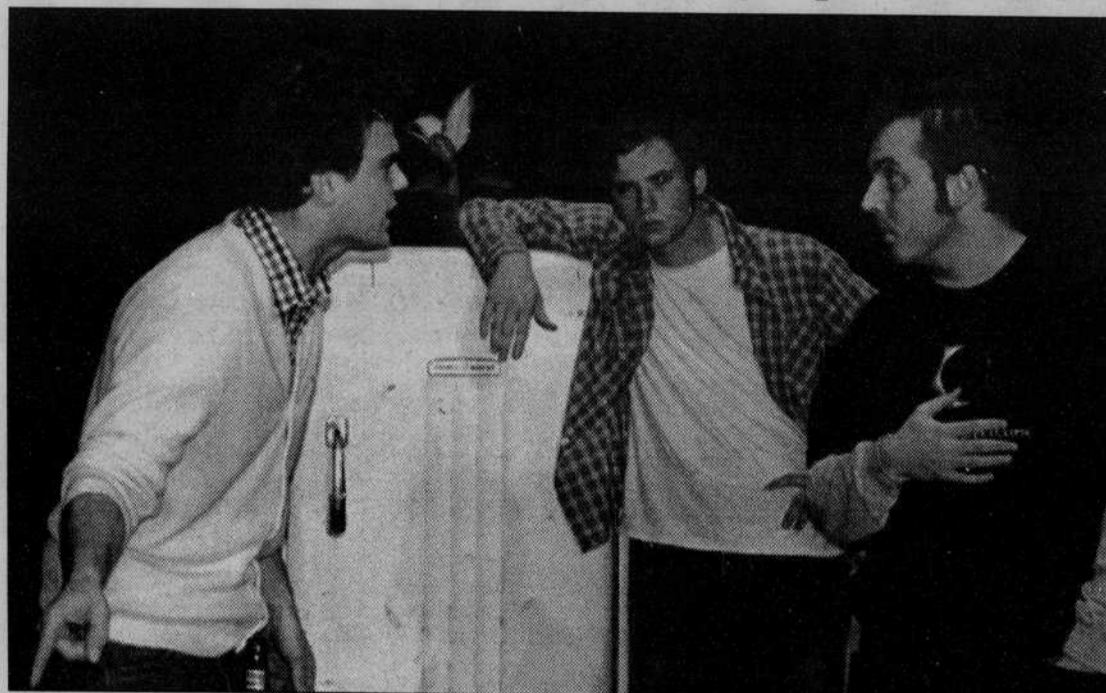
Austin is in the process of writing a screenplay for a Hollywood producer, Sol, when Lee starts talking about a story he has to tell. It is a "real western, based on real life events." The idea catches the ear of

the producer, and his decision to produce both screenplays creates the conflict for the remainder of the show.

Sol is only on stage for some 10 minutes out of the hour-and-a-half running time of the play. Elizabeth Flesh also plays a small part, coming in for the last scene, but this is basically a two-man show. Bryan Henderson gives a wonderfully comedic performance as Austin, providing much more for the role than the timid submission seen in the first few scenes. Joe Von Appen plays the boisterous Lee with great intensity. Von Appen really does become the aggressive, overbearing brother. The audience will cringe with empathy when it sees the way he treats Austin. However, the high level at which Von Appen has to operate does become uncomfortable at times — if nothing else, because his yelling gets old.

The show itself covers large emotional ground, bouncing between the comedic and dramatic, but it leaves the audience unsure about the nature of the play. This could be seen as a fault, but it shouldn't be. Shepard plays with the idea of reality in scenes where Austin and Lee discuss what is real enough to be put in a screenplay. Lee says he knows what is real because he has been living an extreme life. Austin says he knows what is real because he drives on the freeway and shops at Safeway.

The conclusion is that life is full of absurd stories that are totally true but wouldn't sound real if you



The refrigerator may be cold, but tempers run hot in "True West." Here, Austin (left), played by Bryan Henderson, learns that his screenplay was dropped by Sol (right), a Hollywood producer played by Ben Martin, for Lee's (Joe Von Appen) unwritten script.

Photographer Mason West

heard them. This is one of those stories, but condensed into a play. We see characters change roles and say lines that were coming out of other mouths in a very circular way.

But not all the credit goes to the actors. Student director Clayton Carter has created a wonderful environment for this play to take place. Pocket plays are notorious for nondescript sets, but Carter

breaks the norm by putting everything, including the kitchen sink, out on the stage. In the kitchen that is the set, he has done everything humanly possible to make it look like a real kitchen. Then there is the whole typewriter-smashing thing, which is just great for kicks. Although it would be nice if I could say that these material things don't matter, they make a big difference in making the play seem more pro-

fessional. Carter's devotion to the physical appearance of the show reflects his dedication to the quality of the actual performance.

In a term with as many Pocket shows as this winter's, there will always be some that you can miss. This is not one of them.

"True West" runs Feb. 22, 23 and 24 at 5 p.m. at the Pocket Playhouse in Villard Hall. There is a \$1 suggested donation.

## Going solo clearly a good move for Stephen Malkmus

■ His self-named album showcases a new sound while retaining the best of the old



Stephen Malkmus 'Stephen Malkmus'

BMI Music

★★★★★

By Dave Depper  
for the Emerald

I'm going to get right to the point. This is one of the best albums that I have heard in a long, long time. Many moments during the 41 minutes of "Stephen Malkmus" either cracked my face in half with a huge grin or gave me goose bumps of delight upon first listening.

But first, some background: Stephen Malkmus was the lead singer, lead guitarist and principal songwriter for the seminal '90s al-

ternative band Pavement. On albums such as "Slanted and Enchanted" and "Brighten the Corners," the Stockton, Calif., band firmly established themselves as the leading force in indie rock. With lo-fi guitars, frequently gorgeous instrumental passages and lyrics ranging from the absurd to the sublime, Pavement quickly earned a hugely dedicated fan base. Critics adored them, and bands such as Blur and Sonic Youth were quick to name-check them in interviews. Pavement was hip.

Unfortunately, Pavement was also notoriously volatile, and after years of break-up rumors, the band officially threw in the towel late last year. Many wondered if the world would ever again be graced with the glorious antics of Stephen Malkmus, who had by this point relocated to Portland.

Worry not, Pavement fans. "Stephen Malkmus" is a cause for celebration. This album manages to retain the very best points of Malkmus' former work while adding a lot of fresh elements to the mix.

For instance, fans of Malkmus' often bizarre lyrical imagery will have plenty to feast upon here. Take the first line of "The Hook": "At age 19 I was kidnapped by Turkish pirates/Mediterranean thugs." The song goes on to describe what it is like to spend life aboard a galleon full of murderous sailors.

"Jenny and the Ess-Dog" is a touching tale about two hippies who enjoy making out to Dire Straits. My very favorite is "Phan-



Courtesy

Former Pavement mastermind Stephen Malkmus increases quality on his new album.

tasies," which describes an Eskimo couple discussing what it would be like to leave Alaska and become marlin fishermen in Florida. In the final verse, the wife tells her husband, "Later on I'm going to turn the heat up to 10/and thaw your foolish dreams away."

The music on "Stephen Malkmus" is markedly different than the work of Pavement. Replacing his old bandmates with two Portland indie-rock veterans, John Moen and Joanna Bolme, Malkmus has created a new album that sports a sleek, polished sound. This is in sharp contrast to the sound of his former band, which proudly bran-

dished their jangly, out-of-tune guitars and sloppy drumming.

"Stephen Malkmus" contains a veritable cornucopia of instrumental wonders, including bubbly synthesizers, toy pianos and marimbas. The overall sound of the album is goofy and cheerful, and it's clear that Malkmus is enjoying his newfound freedom as a solo artist.

"Stephen Malkmus" is the perfect cure for the winter-term blues. Hell, the album cover even has a tropical sunset on it. This album is for anyone in the mood for some irresistibly catchy melodies, ridiculous lyrics and upbeat tunes.

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