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Pocket Playhouse juxtaposes romantic struggles, comedy

■ Two student-written plays explore relationship issues



'The Chair,' 'Bedroom'

Pocket Playhouse

★★☆☆☆

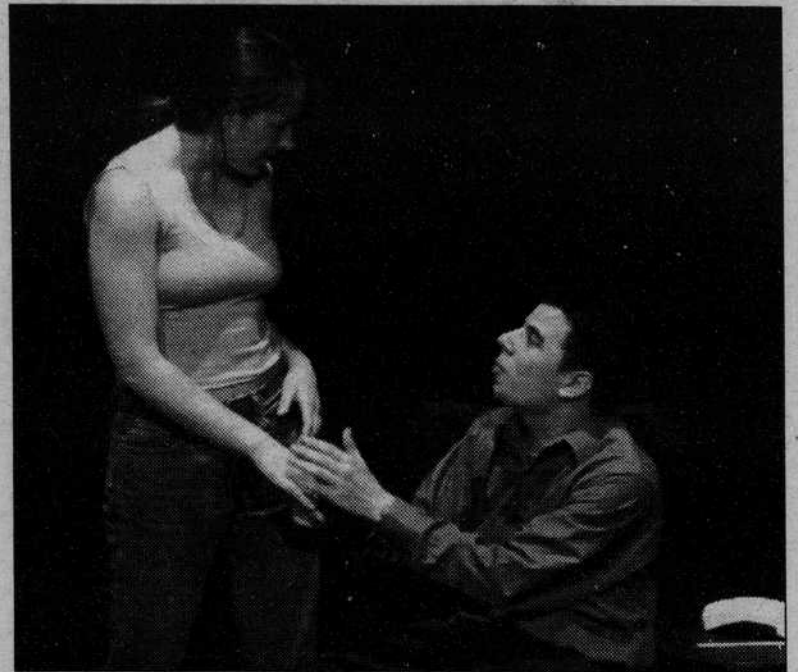
By Mason West
 Oregon Daily Emerald

For the second time this year, directors Eric Lewis and Elizabeth Helman are teaming up in Villard Hall. Their last project, "Speaking Through the Flowers," was a collaboration between the two graduate students. But this time, they decided to do their own things.

Or rather, each other's own things. Each one is directing a one-act play that the other wrote. "The Chair," written by Lewis and directed by Helman, is about a couple's diminishing relationship that is somehow represented in their different feelings toward an old chair. Jon, the overachieving architect, wants to move onward and upward — meaning he wants to dump the chair. His girlfriend Jenna is more nostalgic.

The second one-act, "Bedroom," takes place with another couple struggling in their relationship. But just when you start thinking that the idea is getting played out, the characters stop acting and instead describe their actions from an emotionally removed state.

"Bedroom" goes even farther away from original expectations when it starts cranking up the camp factor. A Ricki Lake-esque talk show host, Ginger, enters the mix followed by Wink, a game show host who is even worse — but in a good way.



Mason West Emerald
 Cassie Schwanke, left, and Mike Miranda express the problems in their relationships and personalities in 'The Chair,' the first of two one-act Playhouse performances.

"Bedroom" saves this Pocket presentation from being too dull and depressing. It is extreme in its humor and its seriousness. "The Chair" has the potential to make a statement, but it comes up short in the end. What hurts the messages of the shows is that the best acting is done by the comedic characters.

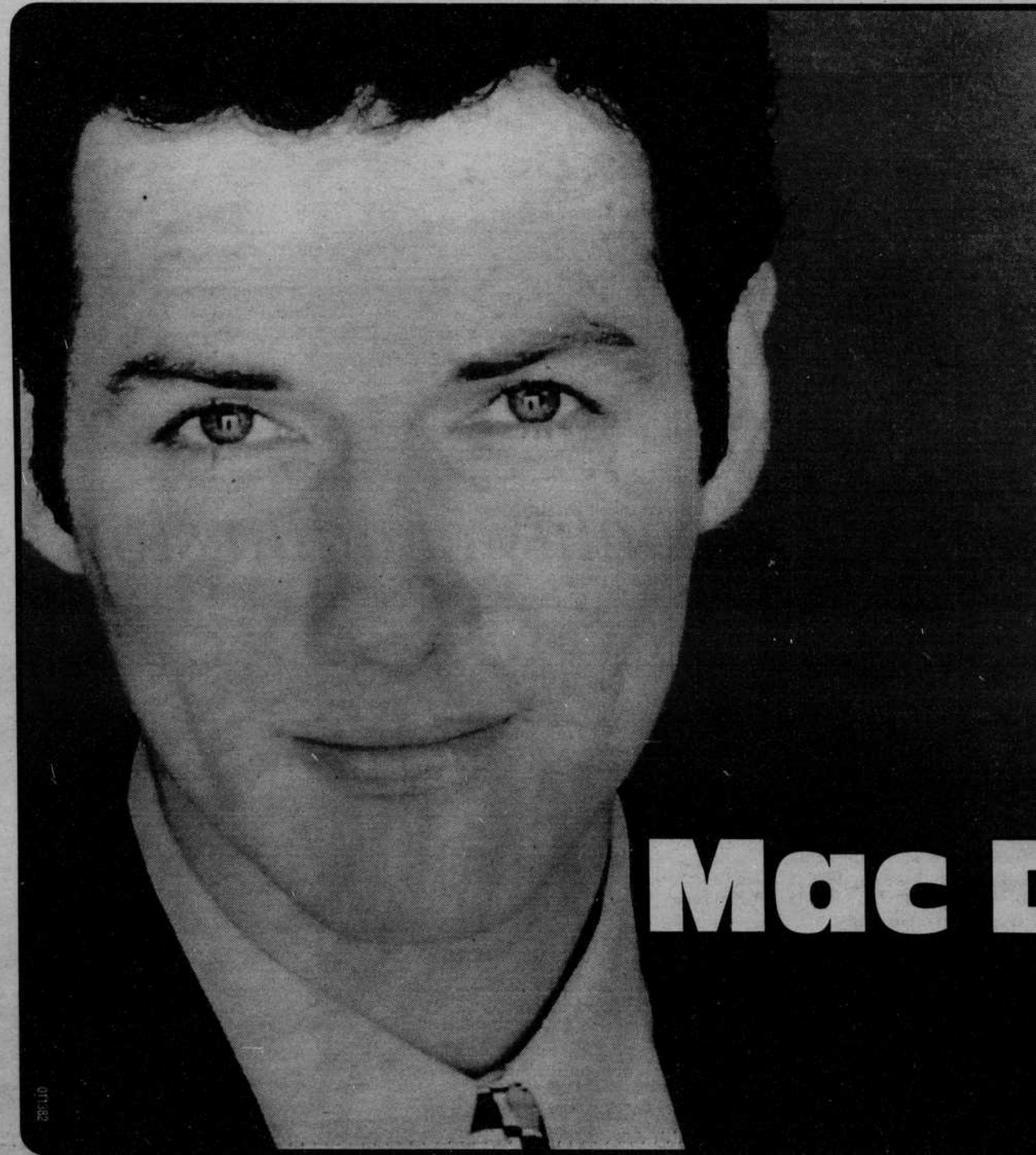
Actually, "The Chair" has no comedic roles, just a few funny lines that are easily overlooked. So the burden is on Moriah Shanahan (Ginger), Tyler Holden (Wink) and Paul Jasaway as the announcer. I predict that Jasaway will be gunning for Rod Roddy's job on "The Price is Right."

It is interesting to see how much the

sex of the author is noticeable in the relationship dynamics. In "The Chair," written by Lewis, the female is not the flawed personality and as such ends up being the weaker character. Conversely, but not quite as noticeably, in Helman's "Bedroom," the male character is more stereotypical and less intriguing.

These points just further show that both pieces need more work to reach the full potential that is hiding in the text and the ideas.

The two plays run today, Friday and Saturday at 5 p.m. in the Pocket Playhouse in Villard Hall. A \$1 donation is suggested.



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