



Courtesy photo

'La Cage' blurs gender roles, promotes diversity

The Tony award-winning musical, based on a French film, focuses on relationships, appearances and tolerance

Ryan Bornheimer
Senior Pulse Reporter

Take a gay couple who run a nightclub in St. Tropez — one with a son conceived in a one-night stand years before — and an impending wedding with the daughter of a conservative politician, and you've got the makings of one of the most enduring and hilarious stories of the past 25 years. And now, "La Cage Aux Folles" has come to Eugene.

Based on the same source material as the original 1978 French film and the 1996 U.S. version, "The Birdcage," the Tony award-winning musical is currently being staged at Actors Cabaret of Eugene. The show, which opened Friday, will run through May 3.

"La Cage Aux Folles" is the story of Albin and George, a couple whose 20 years of domestic tranquility are shattered when the son they have raised together decides to marry the daughter of a high-profile politician. The pair organize a comical sham in an effort to convince the future father-in-law that their living situation is as normal as can be.

After acquiring rights to the show late last summer, ACE's creative team spent the intervening months purchasing costume fabrics from New York and wigs from Los Angeles, which may be one of the reasons why the production has become the most elaborate, expensive show in the organization's history.

Mounting the play, with music and lyrics written by Jerry Herman, has been a great challenge, according to the creative team at ACE. The cast of 18 performers includes women and men, some of whom are dressed in drag. Director Joe Zingo said one of the most enjoyable aspects of the production lies in audience members guessing who is who — or which is which. For this reason, Zingo is reluctant to reveal the casting secrets.

So far, audiences seem to be stumped by the performers' appearances.

"We had one woman come up to us after the show and absolutely refuse to believe that one of our male performers was not a

woman," Zingo said.

Producer Jim Roberts said this inability to distinguish the male performers from the women is especially amazing considering the intimate setting of the venue.

"As far as the drag make-up and costumes, believability is tough in dinner theater such as this," Roberts said.

One reason the drag performers are so convincing might be attributed to the efforts of creative consultant Bob Ollar. The ACE team brought in Ollar, who spent 13 years in Aruba performing as a female impersonator, to train the actors in the ways of feminine behavior, make-up and dress.

The production requires an intense level of commitment and patience from the actors — getting into their drag personas is a two-hour process.

Despite its farcical premise and outlandish design, Kevin Waltz, who por-

trays Albin, said "La Cage Aux Folles" deals with important social issues.

"La Cage is about relationships and the work it takes to keep them alive," Waltz said in press material. "It's also about diversity, tolerance and forgiveness."

It seems audiences are responding.

According to Zingo, the show has been an overwhelming success in its opening days, receiving standing ovations after every performance.

Tickets are available at the ACE Box Office at 996 Willamette St. Regular ticket prices are \$17 in advance and \$22 on the day of the show, with a limited number of senior and student tickets available in advance for \$14. Student rush tickets are available 10 minutes before curtain for \$10 with a current identification card.

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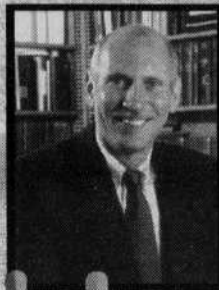
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Music

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upright bass.

"March Waltz," a Pelta composition, "The Laundry Room," and the album's title track, both Tiller originals, are also noteworthy. In these duets, the two have a musical unity unparalleled, with each taking turns soloing. It would be a crime to allow Pelta's downright righteous solos to go unmentioned.

These are but a few highlights, but in actuality, there really aren't specific standouts. The whole disc is one sustained highlight. The best

The best music is usually not immediately visible, and instead must be sought after actively.

music is usually not immediately visible, and instead must be sought after actively. "Man Chasing Woman," is only available at performances and through the artists' Web site, at davidenion.taarka.com. Highest recommendation possible.

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