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just entertainment

James Dean resurrected in West Linn

Christopher Pillette brings the necessary intensity and masculinity to his portrayal of James Dean in Marilyn Hall's *Speed of Light*

B Y G L E N Y O R K

They were not kidding when they named it The West Linn Very Little Theatre. About 45 mismatched chairs sit on risers and lights hanging from the ceiling illuminate the miniscule acting area. But then, not much else is really necessary for a theater.

The major theaters in Portland are chasing after grants the size of which could pay all of Very Little Theatre's bills for a year. VLT's financial concerns center around paying next

Theatre

month's rent. To do that, they are currently running a children's show, presenting musical performances Sunday nights, have a late night show called "Private Wars," as well as performing *Speed of Light*, their main presentation.

Speed of Light is an in-depth, meticulously researched essay on the life of James Dean. It opens with a lengthy lecture about the film idol, then opens up a bit when Dean returns from the dead. (Unfortunately, this interesting return is never explained or explored.) After some initial bantering, the play returns to its scholastic tone as the lecturer and Dean expound on the actor's life.

Playwright Marilyn Hall's work has many exciting moments, even for those only marginally interested in Dean. The insights into acting as an art and the scuttlebutt from behind the movie camera are fascinating, but Hall's con-

centration on factual information robs the evening of warmth and momentum.

The playful, free-wheeling format of the play lends itself to the use of some creative theatrics. At one point, Dean describes auto racing while the lecturer vocalizes the sounds of high-powered engines. Later, the lecturer lists the star's television credits which Dean punctuates on a drum.

Christopher Pillette brings the necessary intensity and masculinity to his portrayal of James Dean. He makes Dean's passion for his art and his egotism a firm foundation for the character. Less successful is his portrayal of Dean's insecurity and lack of self-awareness.

The more fundamental, but less gratifying role of the lecturer is played by Glenn Haberman. The script gives him little in the way of character, and Haberman fails to embellish much on his own. Fortunately, his line delivery is lively and varied, essential for some of the lengthy, fact-laden speeches.

Both actors are most exciting when embracing a simple, sincere moment. The intimacy of the theater makes it conducive to subtleties generally lost in a large hall, and false emotion is easily detected because of the close proximity of the audience.

If *Speed of Light* is a success, it is partially due to this unique intimacy. It is also due to the energy, enthusiasm, and genuine love the actors hold for the theater. It is tempting to contemplate the outstanding major productions that The Very Little Theatre may someday deliver.

But VLT's simplicity is what makes it unique and valuable right now.

Speed of Light plays Fridays and Saturdays at 8:00, through March 25. Tickets are \$5. Call 655-6150 for reservations.

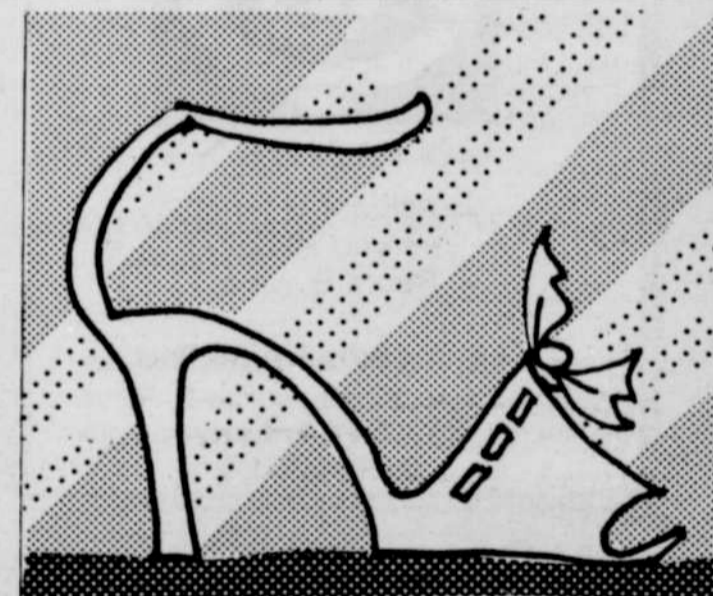
Foofy opens original theater season

The populace of Portland seems to have been stricken with a bug. No, I'm not talking about the flu bug. I mean the theater bug — the "original" theater bug. This warm and damp Oregon weather has caused the scourge to grow all over the place. Monday and Tuesday nights have become original theater nights at the Columbia Theatre and at the Long Goodbye, playwrights are meeting in guilds, and people are going so far as to improv in each others' basements.

Happily, things have gotten completely, stark raving out of control at the end of this month, a whole season of this sort of stuff is set to open in the downstairs part of The Bull Ring Northwest. The theater, Stark Raving Theatre; the season opener, *The Foofy, Open-Toed Shoe*.

Stark Raving Theatre is not necessarily a women's theater company, nor is it necessarily a gay and lesbian theater company. And so, the first show is a not necessarily politically correct, lesbian, feminist, mystery farce.

Stark Raving staff member Robin Suttles explains it like this: "We are a theater without an agenda. We want to do quality original work



and *Foofy* is a fun show. I suppose you could say that we are a company that doesn't segregate itself into a category."

This is reflected in the theater's staff, made up so far of one heterosexual woman, one heterosexual man, and one lesbian.

The Foofy Open-Toed Shoe opens on March 30 and runs through April 22. The cast consists of nine lesbians and a dog. Some of these women also make up Portland's first women's improv company, WACKO (Womyn's Acting Company and Comedy Organization), yet another group of people who improvise in each others' basements.

Just out

Oregon's complete lesbian & gay connection