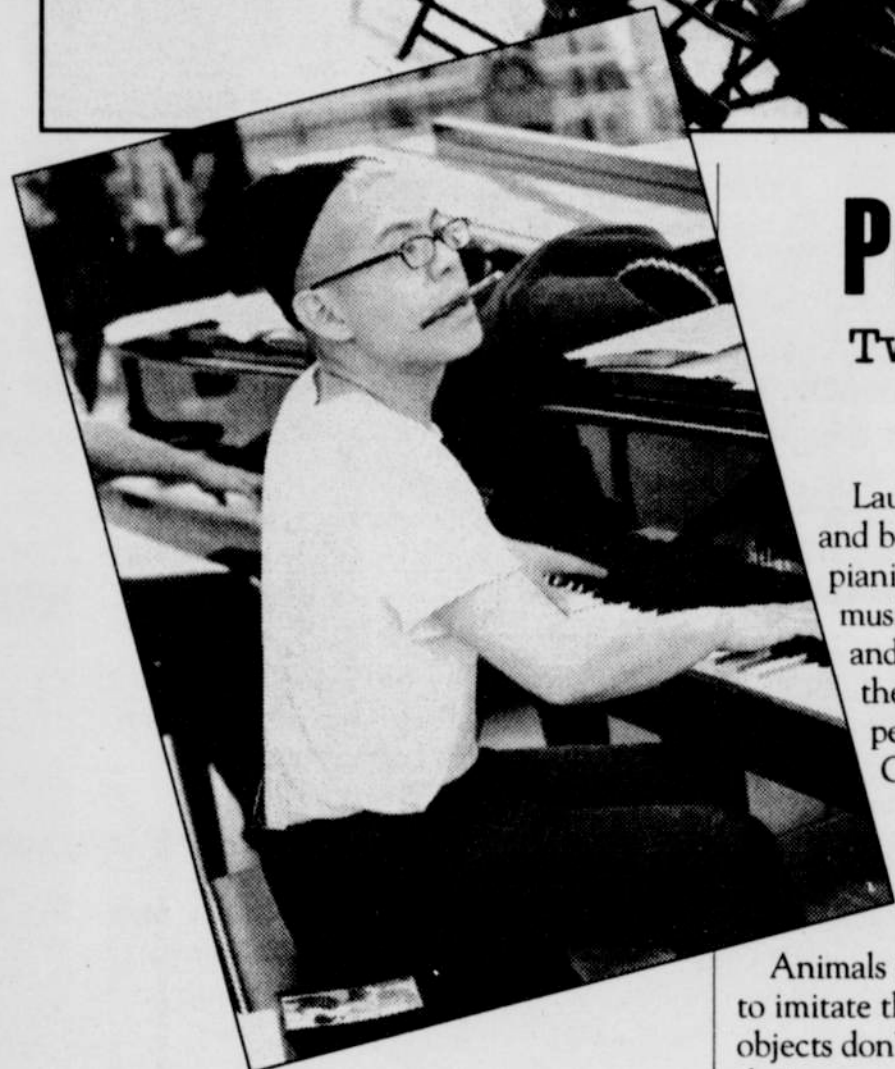
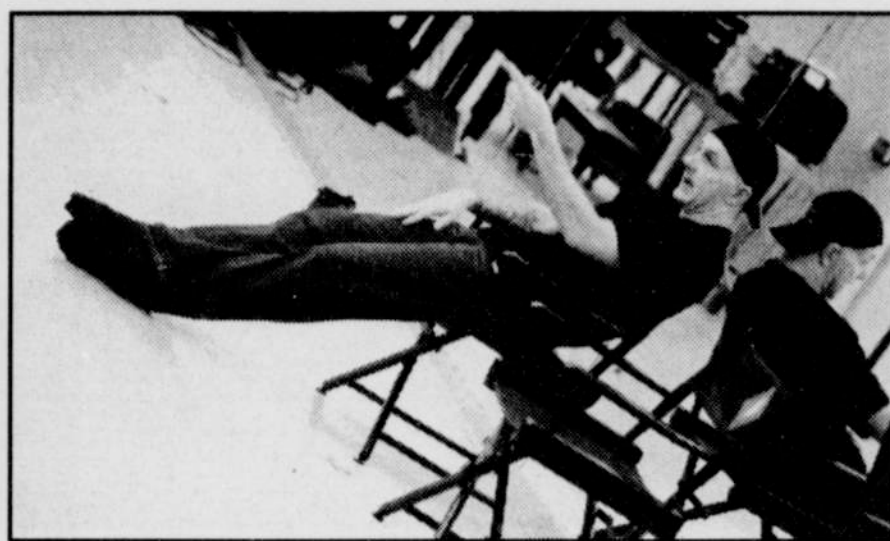


THEATER



Putting their heads together

Two Portland treasures meditate on friendship

BY ANDY SIMON • PHOTOS BY MARTY DAVIS

Lauderdale is well-known in Portland and beyond as a composer, concert pianist and leader of Pink Martini. The music he wrote for the piece is wistful and transparent—impressionistic in the style of Satie or Ravel. He will perform it live, joined by Pansy Chang playing cello.

"It's not easy choreographing for inanimate objects," Canfield says, noting the particular challenge *Leaves* presented him.

Animals move, and he knows how to imitate their motions, but inanimate objects don't move, at least not on their own.

By watching, both in nature and in films, how the wind moves leaves, Canfield recognized that they retain a kind of suppleness until after they fall. That suppleness became a theme in his choreography for the piece.

Leaves will be danced by two men. A pas de deux often has romantic and erotic dimensions. Does that make *Leaves* a gay work?

No, Canfield says. In the past, he has created dances that are gay because they deal explicitly with gay issues, but that's not his intent with *Leaves*.

He acknowledges that it is possible to see a sexual element in the dance regardless of gender: "A man and a woman, two women, any combination can be seen as sexy. A woman dressed in a leotard standing alone in the middle of a stage can be sexy." But while sex may be present as an undercurrent, it is not the point of *Leaves*.

The dance is about a friendship more than

about a romantic relationship. Canfield's intent is to portray an equality of support between the two characters in the face of a shared fate. There might be a kind of love between them, but the work is not a love duet.

Lauderdale, who is not shy about proclaiming his gayness, resists labeling this piece. "I'm gay," he says, "but it isn't." He quotes John Waters: "Being gay is not enough."

He argues that the arts are moving beyond identity politics. He thinks part of the goal of



James Canfield (left) confers with Thomas Lauderdale

art is to exceed expectations, and that means breaking down categories.

He adds that in *Leaves* the gender of the dancers is not a given of the text. In the German version of *Bambi* the leaves have no gender identity.

In the English translation, one is identified as female, but gender of the other is not specified. Canfield notes that he chose two men for the roles because he finds a certain kind of

grace and strength in male dancers that he felt was needed to carry the emotional drama of the piece.

Leaves is the middle of the three works by Canfield that make up *Signatures*. The program opens with *Degas Impressions*, a classical piece inspired by the famous paintings of ballerinas. It is one of Oregon Ballet Theatre's most popular repertory works.

Canfield is excited about the fact that the first two works of the program feature live music. *Degas Impressions* will be danced to music by Chopin arranged for piano and violin.

"Live music adds a lot," Canfield says. "Every performance becomes a new collaboration. Something new happens every time."

Completing the program is *GRAPHIC*, Canfield's newest major work. It was inspired by the dancers themselves and exhibits both the technique and artistry that have made Oregon Ballet Theatre a much-admired dance company.

Canfield uses phrases like "in-your-face energy" and "edgy athleticism" to describe it. He hopes it will get the audience to open their eyes if not raise their eyebrows.

The entire program is designed to showcase the strengths of the Oregon Ballet Theatre's dancers. *Degas Impressions* highlights the women in the company in a classical setting. *Leaves* is contemporary but uses traditional forms to express strong emotions. *GRAPHIC* is a leap from tradition into the present moment. Canfield hopes the program will convey some of the excitement he feels about dance and give the audience something to think and talk about. **J**

JAMES CANFIELD SIGNATURES will be performed March 3, 4, 8, 9 and 10 at Keller Auditorium. For ticket information call 503-222-5538.

ANDY SIMON is a Portland teacher and freelance writer.

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