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continued funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, speaking about how he witnessed bringing the performing arts to rural America and how those experiences changed lives and communities.

Rauch began his appointment as the newest artistic director at OSF late in the summer of 2006 with a bit of controversy when he immediately restructured the artistic department, eliminating five positions by the end of the 2007 season. He admitted the decision was difficult but needed to be done to allow for change. Like his predecessor, Libby Appel, who also brought her share of controversy to OSF when she was appointed artistic director 13 years ago, Rauch has a vision for the festival.

"I completely honor what Libby has built," he says. "I wouldn't have wanted this job if I didn't passionately believe in it, and there are things I care about that will definitely influence my work here."

The mission of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival is "to create fresh and bold interpretations of classic and contemporary plays in repertory, shaped by the diversity of our American culture, using Shakespeare as our standard and inspiration."

Rauch will continue to honor the Bard by stag-

ing at least four of Shakespeare's plays a year, but he wants to feature other classic plays as well, not just European classics. His future plans also include exercising the "diversity of our American culture" angle of the OSF mission. Rauch is commissioning a series of plays based in U.S. history, collecting some of America's stories into a body of work, premiering at the OSF campuses.

"I am very interested in the bigger stories that we have as a culture. Shakespeare weaved a lot of European history throughout his works, and there is a lot of untold stories in American history that shaped where we are today," says Rauch.

The freshman artistic director immediately began incorporating his vision into next season's offerings as he unveiled the 2008 season lineup in March, highlighted with four Shakespearean plays: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Coriolanus*, *Othello* and *The Comedy of Errors*. Two late, great American playwrights will be honored with productions of August Wilson's *Fences* and Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge*.

The 2008 season will break with tradition, as *Our Town* will have the distinction of playing to the stars in the outdoor amphitheater—the only 20th century play produced on the Elizabethan Stage. Rauch will launch his goal of global theater representation when he brings *The Clay Cart*, an



Rauch (hugging son Liam) and partner Christopher Liam Moore celebrate in Los Angeles on the day they finalized Xavier's adoption.

East Indian epic translated from original Sanskrit, to Ashland. He will continue to deliver the humor quotient to OSF audiences as a surreal story of love and obesity takes center stage in *Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*.

Rauch will also take OSF on the road when the world premiere production of *Welcome Home, Jenny Sutter* tours Washington, D.C., after closing at the festival. The play tackles the contemporary story of a female Marine after her return from Iraq.

In addition to the already powerful lineup of shows in 2008, Rauch is excited to direct *The Further Adventures of Hedda Gabler* by Coos Bay native Jeff Whitty, Tony-winning writer of the Broadway musical *Avenue Q*. A comedy about stereotyping, *Hedda* features different fictional characters outside their art, two of whom are based on gay men from the '60s.

"I am really excited to bring other plays in the future to the festival that have prominent gay and lesbian characters as an openly gay director," says Rauch.

A point of pride for both Rauch and the OSF family is the daylong Daedalus Project. 2007 marks the 20th year of the fund-raiser for HIV/AIDS research; last year, the benefit raised \$60,000 for regional nonprofits. Many different events throughout the day help raise money, including bake sales, artist booths, raffles, food, T-shirts, play readings and an infamous evening show. The 2007 Daedalus Project will be held Aug. 20.

"There is nowhere else in the world I would rather be than here at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. The audience is loyal, passionate and smart," says Rauch. "I honor and appreciate all that we have done and where we are going."

As governmental funding continues to shrink and generations of America's youth continue to experience withering art curriculums, challenges lie ahead for the arts throughout the United States. But passionate professionals like Rauch and the staff of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival are working to make the storytelling more accessible to all audiences.

"It's the imagination of the artists and the audience that matters," says the veteran director. "We've all come together to watch and tell stories...we all have a job in the process of storytelling." **to**

The OREGON SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL runs February through October. This year's productions are Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, *The Tempest* and *The Taming of the Shrew*; *Tartuffe*; *On the Razzle*; *Gem of the Ocean*; *Rabbit Hole*; *Distracted*; and the world premieres of *The Cherry Orchard* and *Tracy's Tiger*. Tickets can be purchased by calling the box office at 800-219-8161 or online at www.osfashland.org.

CHELSEA FINE is a southern Oregon freelance writer and photographer.



Rauch rehearses *Hedda Gabler* with actor Robin Goodrin Nordli in 2003.

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