on stage

Artists Repertory Theatre presents the Portland premiere of *The Clean House*, in which four women discover that tidiness has its limitations, through March 2. *(Call for times. 1516 SW Alder St. $20-$47 from 503-241-1278.)*

Arts Equity presents *Exit the King*, theater of the absurd about a king who has ruled his country for 400 years and refuses to give up power despite the certainty of his impending death, through Feb. 16. *(Call for times. 606 Main St., Vancouver, Wash. $10-$24 from 360-695-3770.)*

Blue Monkey Theater Co. presents *Antigone*, inspired by the 2,000-year-old Greek tragedy by Sophocles, in which a teenage girl faces down the most powerful man in the country, through Feb. 24 at West End Theater. *(7 pm Thursday-Saturday, 2 pm Sunday. 1220 SW Taylor St. $16-$20 from 503-593-2466.)*

CoHo Productions presents the U.S. premiere of *Tales of Ordinary Madness*, which captures the contemporary life of Prague 30-somethings wallowing in a sort of narcissistic isolation and nostalgic loneliness, through Feb. 23. *(8 pm Thursday-Saturday, 2 pm Sunday. 2257 NW Raleigh St. $20-$23 from 503-220-2646.)*

Curious Productions presents *The Neutrino Project*—a "theatrical movie experience" in which three casts, three crews and three fast runners perform, shoot, edit, score and project a completely improvised movie in the time it takes for the audience to watch it—through Feb. 22 at Hollywood Theatre. *(9:30 pm Friday. 4122 NE Sandy Blvd. $10 from 503-432-8633.)*

Defunkt Theatre presents *The Communist Dracula Pageant*, a seriocomic tale in which Nikolae and Elena Ceausescu are put on trial for genocide—presided over by master of ceremonies Vlad Tepes, the original Dracula—through Feb. 16 at Back Door Theater. *(8 pm Thursday-Sunday. 4319 SE Hawthorne Blvd. $10-$15 from 503-481-2960; Thursdays and Sundays are "pay what you will.")*

Fever Theater presents *Believers*, a musical about cults, through Feb. 2. *(8 pm. 1120 SE Main St. #102. $10-$20 sliding scale from 503-381-6814.)*

Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center presents performance artists sharing legends and personal tales representing the many *Facets of Africa*, Feb. 7-26. *(10 am Tuesday and Thursday plus 2 pm Feb. 16. 5340 N Interstate Ave. $5-$10 from 503-823-4322.)*

Key Turn Project presents *Day In: Day Out*, an evening of dance and live music exploring different work environments in relation to private/home settings, Feb. 15 and 16 at Village Ballroom. *(8 pm. 700 NE Dekum St. $8-$15 sliding scale.)*

Lakewood Theatre Company presents *The Curate Shakespeare As You Like It*, in which wild laughter abounds when an actor set to perform the beloved comedy heads off to join professional wrestling, leaving only six actors to perform 33 roles, through Feb. 17. *(Call for times. 368 S State St., Lake Oswego. $23-$25 from 503-635-3901.)*

Miracle Theatre presents a Spanish-language production of gay playwright Federico García Lorca's *Bodas de Sangre*, in which a young woman yearns for her forbidden lover and an escape from the constraints of her impending marriage, through Feb. 23. *(7:30 pm Thursday, 8 pm Friday and Saturday, 2 pm Sunday. 525 SE Stark St. $15-$20 from 503-236-7253.)*

Miracle Theatre presents *Cuentos—Searching for My Story*, a bilingual, family-friendly celebration of the cultures of Spain and Mexico, Feb. 2-23. *(3 pm Saturday. 525 SE Stark St. $5-$10 from 503-236-7253.)*

New Century Players present *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, William Shakespeare's enchanting play of romance, magic and comedy, set during the Summer of Love, Feb. 15-23 at Rex Putnam High School in Milwaukie. *(Call for times. 4950 SE Roethe Road. $10-$12 from 503-367-2620.)*

Northwest Children's Theater presents *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, in which the famous New Hampshire statesman defends a 19th century farmer who is tricked into selling his soul to the devil, through Feb. 24 at Northwest Neighborhood Cultural Center. *(7 pm Friday and Saturday, 2 pm Saturday and Sunday. 1819 NW Everett St. $10-$20 from 503-222-4480.)*

Portland Center Stage presents *The Beard of Avon*, a comedy that asks whether a simple bumpkin like William Shakespeare could possibly have had the global knowledge to write as prolifically and artfully as he's purported to, through March 8 in Gerding Theater at the Armory. *(Call for times. 128 NW 11th Ave. $16.50-$61.50 from 503-445-3700.)*

Portland Center Stage presents *Twelfth Night*, William Shakespeare's deliciously complicated cross-dressing comedy about deception, disguise and star-crossed love, through March 9 in Gerding Theater at the Armory. *(Call for times. 128 NW 11th Ave. $16.50-$61.50 from 503-445-3700.)*

Portland Center Stage presents *A Feminine Ending*, an eye-opening exploration of ambition, identity and actualization in Generation XX, Feb. 8-March 23 in Gerding Theater at the Armory. *(Call for times. 128 NW 11th Ave. $16.50-$61.50 from 503-445-3700.)*

Portland Civic Theatre Guild presents a reading of gay playwright Terrence McNally's rich, vivid portrayal of glamorous diva Maria Callas as she conducts a *Master Class* for aspiring opera singers, Feb. 5 at The Old Church. *(10:30 am. 1422 SW 11th Ave. $6.)*

Portland Opera continues its 2007-08 "Great Women of the Stage" Season with Handel's *Rodelinda* Feb. 8-16 at Keller Auditorium. *(Call for times. 222 SW Clay St. $41.75-$147.75 from box office or Ticketmaster.)*

Profile Theatre Project continues its John Guare season with the Portland premiere of *A Few Stout Individuals*, which re-envisions a meeting between a now penniless and mentally deteriorating Ulysses S. Grant and his memoir writer, Samuel Clemens, through Feb. 17 at Theater Theatre. *(Call for times. 3430 SE Belmont St. $10-$28 from 503-242-0080.)*

Profile Theatre Project continues its John Guare season with a staged reading of *Bosoms and Neglect*, in which two psychiatric patients begin an impassioned affair when their doctor goes on vacation, through Feb. 3 at Theater Theatre. *(Call for times. 3430 SE Belmont St. $10-$15 from 503-242-0080.)*

Re-Theatre Instrument presents *Faust, U.S.*, a topical treatment of Christopher Marlowe's classic *Doctor Faustus* about a politician who leverages the environment for a chance to improve national social services, through Feb. 16 at Imago Theatre. *(7:30 pm Friday-Sunday. 17 SE Eighth Ave. $16-$26 from 503-201-2591.)*

St. Johns North End Players present Neil Simon's *God's Favorite*, transferring the Book of Job to a Long Island mansion where resides a tycoon, his wife, a prodigal son and a pair of kooky twins, Feb. 15-March 2 at St. Andrews Episcopal Church. *(8 pm Friday and Saturday, 2 pm Sunday. 7600 N Hereford Ave. $8-$10 from 503-286-3679.)*

Super Project Lab revives *Meet Your ___!* Feb. 16-March 1 in Gerding Theater at the Armory. This is an improvised evening inspired by Portland personalities, including award-winning humorist Marc Acito on Feb. 29 and City Commissioner Sam Adams on March 1. *(10:30 pm Friday and Saturday. 128 NW 11th Ave. $10 from 503-445-3700.)*

Tears of Joy Theatre revives the hit puppet play *Anansi the Spider* through Feb. 10 at Winningstad Theatre. *(Call for times. 1111 SW Broadway. $13-$16 from 503-248-0557.)*

Theatre Vertigo presents *Where's My Money?*—a sardonic and caustic play about infidelity, debt, fame and paranormal activity that vivisects the institution of marriage—through Feb. 9 at Theater Theatre. *(8 pm Thursday-Saturday. 3430 SE Belmont St. $15 from 503-306-0870; Thursdays are "pay what you will.")*

Third Eye Theatre presents gay playwright Charles Busch's *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom* through Feb. 16 at Back Door Theatre. *(10:30 pm Friday and Saturday. 4319 SE Hawthorne Blvd. $12 from 503-970-8874.)*

Third Rail Repertory presents the Tony-nominated *Shining City*, a haunting story of guilt, loss and missed connections, through Feb. 2 at Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center. *(8 pm. 5340 N Interstate Ave. $16-$25 from 503-235-1101.)*

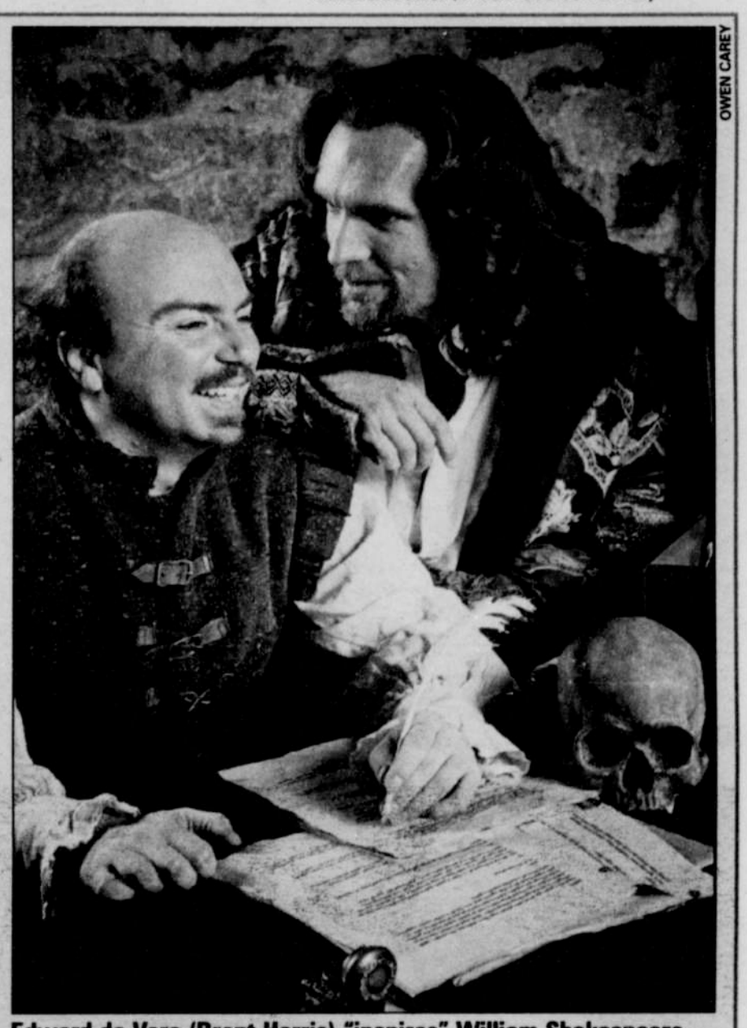
What! Theater Company presents *Jesus in Love*, a romantic adventure starring a bisexual savior, a woman he meets at a party and a half-dozen wayward saints, Feb. 14-24 at Classic Pianos of Portland. *(8 pm Thursday-Saturday, 2 pm Sunday. No show Feb. 17. 3003 SE Milwaukie Ave. $7 from 503-981-2179.)*

The *Real* Shakespeare Question

Who was Shakespeare? A lowly actor with high ideals? Some closeted contemporary? An anonymous aristocrat? This classic suggestion of mistaken identity receives a comic twist in Portland Center Stage's ***The Beard of Avon***, Amy Freed's scholarly scandal playing in rep with the Bard's ***Twelfth Night***. But the more probing—and equally debated—question might be that of *sexual* identity: Was our Willie gay?

Given my tendency to heretically dismiss Shakespeare as inaccessible to the point of near-irrelevancy, I sought out the advice of **William S. Gregory**, Portland's own playwright of note who was recently awarded the 2007 Walt Morey Fellowship for Drama. As both dramatist and gay man, Gregory surely had a quip to quote about the bloke.

So I began with the basic *Who really wrote the classic canon?* His response: William Shakespeare. "A middle-class man from Stratford who came to London, became involved in the theater as a minor player, then part owner of a theater, and wrote his plays primarily as a source of income. I believe he was a steady theatrical craftsman whose work has become vastly overrated since his death—to such an extent as to obliterate or overemphasize the particular charms it does in fact contain."



OWEN CAREY

Edward de Vere (Brent Harris) "inspires" William Shakespeare (Darius Pierce) in *The Beard of Avon*.

And then the queer question: *Was he gay?* "It is important to recognize that the labels gay/bi/queer/questioning are late 19th century inventions. In Shakespeare's time there was no concept of a 'gay identity' or even a 'straight identity.' Sex acts were viewed as actions and not expressions of personality. It is obvious from his writing that Shakespeare was aware—for theatrical use, certainly—of a great variety of human love and desire. Love between the sexes, love between members of the same sex, love in a pure platonic form, love in a vigorous sexual form—all find expression in his work. It is, however, impossible to tell which of these emotions/desires/states he personally and regularly experienced. What can be said is that he did not flinch away from the expression of a great variety of love and passion, and so is a model of artistic expression we would all do well to emulate."

Twelfth Night and *The Beard of Avon* continue through March 9 in Gerding Theater at the Armory, 128 N.W. 11th Ave. Tickets are $16.50-$61.50 from 503-445-3700 or www.pcs.org.

—*Timothy Krause*

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