

'Seagull' talks about what matters

ELISABETH MEYER
Staff Writer

Anton Chekov wrote more plays than I can count, but he wrote at least one, in any case, and that's what matters right now. All we need to know at this point is this single play, "The Seagull," does in fact exist, is in fact playing at Portland Center Stage, and is in fact well worth your time.

It's the story of artists struggling with issues of talent, originality and fame. Arkadina (Joan MacIntosh), the actress mother, her lover Tregorin (Scott Coopwood), a famous writer, and her playwright son Konstanin (Michael Newcomber) are spending their summer in the country. Konstanin's sweetheart Nina (Christine Calfas), a country girl and aspiring actress, is attracted to the fame of Arkadina and Tregorin.

This is one of those things you tell your friends you really enjoyed, you tell them what it was about, and they nod and change the subject. The plot

isn't overly intriguing, and no particular character dominates the action. And once you learn the central figures play actresses and playwrights who spend a good deal of the play talking about new art forms, you're expecting a self-indulgent introspectionfest.

It's hard to say whom the play is about. There are so many Hamlets to deal with! The characters are so caught up in themselves, I thought I was watching a five- or six-ring circus. Any plot action besides individual characters spinning in circles involves trying to pull others into his or her own orbit, which I find both fascinating and repelling.

I was bothered at first that none of the characters seemed able to really connect with another. Although all they do is talk, no real exchange happens. The actors show this noncommunication well by switching from conversation to conversation quickly and always trying to steal the spotlight for themselves. The sensitive Konstanin wants to love his mother and wants her love,

but finds her affection too showy or fake and pulls a way.

Tregorin wants assurance that he has talent but can't accept compliments since he is constantly flattered by admirers. The childlike Nina knows her purity is virtually her only appeal, but is dying to sacrifice it at the altar of fame and experience.

Chekhov called his play a comedy. I can only assume he meant it ironically, because it is easily one of the softest, quietest stories I've seen on stage. There were a few obvious laugh lines, and we responded, but I wished we audience members could express our feelings of empathy and sadness for the characters' inability to simply be.

Would-be actress Nina (Christine Calfas) acts in her boyfriend's play, hoping to demonstrate a new art form to the world.

Photo by Owen Blair



Party honors pacifist poet

ALLISON GERFIN
Copy Editor

In The Pentagon one person's job is to/ take pins out of towns, hills, and fields, and then save the pins for later.

From "Things I Learned Last Week"

William Stafford couldn't attend this month's celebration of his birthday, but the crowd in Gregory Forum last Thursday, Jan. 24, was ardently keeping his memory alive.

Stafford, once Oregon's Poet Laureate, died in 1993, but Friends of William Stafford promotes his work and life every year to honor his Jan. 17, 1914, birth in Hutchinson, Kan. The celebration at Clackamas was one of 22 held in Oregon and Washington this year.

Paulann Petersen, FWS event coordinator and host, likened Stafford to another famous January birthday man, Martin Luther King Jr. She said they both believed in the same ideals: pacifism, human rights, human equality and justice. Stafford was a conscientious objector during WWII, and many of his poems speak of standing by truth, or in other words, in what one believes.

Some esteemed local poets took turns at the microphone to read a favorite poem of Stafford's followed by a self-penned poem inspired by him. CCC faculty members Kate Gray, Diane Averill and Jim Grabill, PCC instructor Tim Barnes and Sunset High School English teacher Victoria Wyttenberg all shared their passion for Stafford's evocative



ELISABETH MEYER / Clackamas Print

Left to right: Dorothy Stafford, Kate Gray, Paulann Peterson, and Derek Sheffield paid tribute to William Stafford last Thursday. Some attendees read poetry and told stories in remembrance.

phrases and deeply-lived principles. Then audience members joined in the party by reading their personal favorites.

Stafford's poems obviously have had a profound effect on those lucky enough to have discovered him, and it was impossible not to be inspired to read his work after being in this devoted crowd.

A professor at Lewis and Clark College for many years, Stafford was a down-to-earth and unpretentious man who liked to tinker with mechanical contraptions. He said that if he wasn't a teacher and writer he would have owned a bicycle shop.

I've bullied rusty iron and made it

remember what to do, and once on a back road

I put out a fire under the hood

of a car;

but these greasy geniuses have to conjure miracles day after day just to keep going.

From "Fixers"

This prolific poet made a habit out of writing first thing in the morning so he would be sure to get it done every day; he wrote his last poem the morning of his last day.

It seems that there was no aspect of life left untouched by the common sense of his words. If you are interested in learning more about Stafford before next year's celebration, find a copy of "The Way It Is: New and Selected Poems" by William Stafford, published by Graywolf Press.

Poet's corner

Reactions: From start to finish

Take me back to yesterday
When virgin America was still alive
To the time when the fabric of
Our Livelihood stood tall and mighty.

Terror took its toll
They've swallowed buildings whole
Lives were lost, souls were not
Their spirit lives in our melting pot.

Busting out with tears
I long to help those far and near.
Charities and drives for blood
Our veins are an open flood.

Bin Laden, my note to you, beware
You've only created a scare
United we stand together
America is forever.

By Daisy Bain