

The beggars come to the opera

Stephen Marc Beaudoin celebrates Portland's highs and lows with his adaptation of classic British satire

BY AMANDA WALDROUPE
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

You could say it was only a matter of time before the sit-lie ordinance, people being spare-changed multiple times per block near Pioneer Square, Portland's unique political establishment, and Reed College hipsters became the subjects of art.

Inspired "by people who are making it through the night not living with a roof over their heads," local singer, performing artist and writer Stephen Marc Beaudoin is taking on those topics, and many others he thinks makes Portland great (and not so great) in his musical adaptation of "The Beggar's Opera."

Written in 1728 by John Gay, "The Beggar's Opera" is a satire set to musical theater (the precursor to the modern-day musical) about Polly Peachum, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Peachum, who runs off with Macheath, a famous highwayman simultaneously carrying on an affair with Lucy Lockit. Mr. and Mrs. Peachum want to kill Macheath for his money, as does Lucy Lockit.

Through scheming, wheeling and dealing, Lucy Lockit and the Peachums conspire throughout the musical how to kill Macheath and then split his fortune. In the end, Polly winds up marrying Macheath to everyone's happiness, but not before a jailbreak, a near death-by-poison experience, and four (pregnant) women separately claiming that Macheath is her husband.

In telling Polly's story, "The Beggar's Opera" satirizes everything about London culture at that time, including class relationships and warfare, political corruption, sex scandals and poverty.

"The idea that people of means can break

the law and get away from it and people not out of means break the law and suffer is very much at the heart of the piece," Beaudoin says.

The 15 actors in Beaudoin's musical adaptation are homeless individuals living in a camp together, trying to survive in Portland. Finally feeling like they no longer have any influence over their miserable lives, they decide to work together to put on a production of "The Beggar's Opera," playing characters inspired by City Commissioner Randy Leonard, singing diva Storm Large, and set in a city Beaudoin sees as much defined by Voodoo Doughnuts as by its 11.6 percent unemployment rate.

Two weeks before the musical's October 22 opening at the Someday Lounge, Beaudoin sat down with Street Roots before a rehearsal to talk about what he calls his

biggest creative undertaking since moving to Portland three and a half years ago.

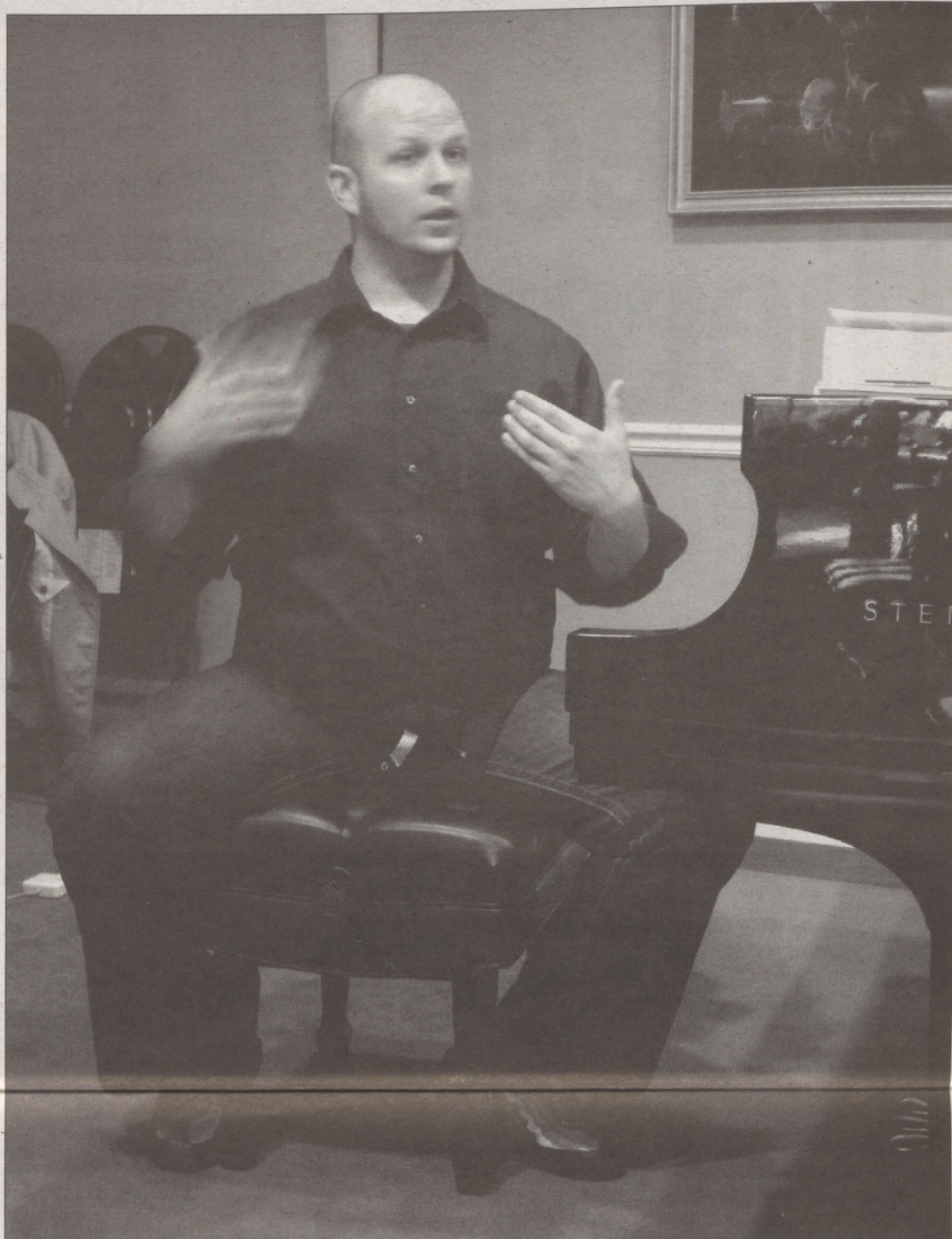
Amanda Waldroupe: I understand that you were commissioned by Opera Theater Oregon to write an adaptation of the "Beggar's Opera." Why you, and why this particular play?

Stephen Marc Beaudoin: I've been dying to do this piece for a long time. It's existed 300 years and continues to be reinvented and revisited. It's timely because class warfare, philandering politicians, abuse of power and social inequality still exist in just as pronounced (ways) if not more so than in 1728.

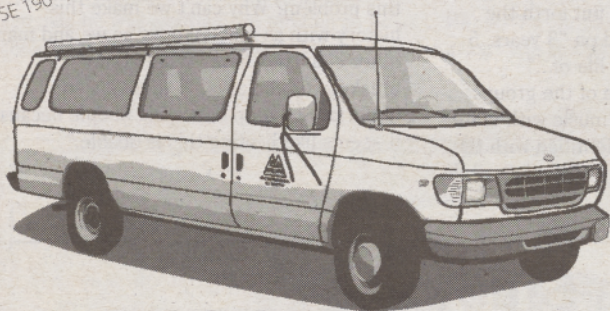
A.W.: Why were you dying to do it?

Stephen Marc Beaudoin talks about his new play, The Beggar's Opera, which features classic characters with a familiar Portland twist.

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