

Jennifer Coombs and Sharon Sless
in Lord Leebrick's *How I Learned
to Drive* opening June 4.



CLIFF COLES

Playing Politics

Heavy-hitting drama and the new boy in town.

UO Philosophy Professor and playwright Cheyney Ryan calls his newest play, *Shock and Awe*, “a sophisticated political satire that will drive George Bush into retirement.”

Confidence is good.

The play’s action occurs on the eve of the American invasion of Iraq. A group of friends, all former radicals who went to Yale in 1968, have reunited. “It turns out to be kind of a mystery — you find out quickly there’s a reason they’re all there,” says Ryan. “It’s a *Big Chill* sort of thing.”

But many in the group have left behind their activist past and are now either going along with or are actually part of the Bush administration. The play raises moral issues about how people change their political whims, for expediency or for their jobs.

“How do we feel about those people who’ve changed horses in midstream? This play presents the audience with the opportunity to think about those issues,” says Hans Christofferson, who directs the public read-

ing of *Shock and Awe* at 8 pm May 30 and 31 at Tsunami Books.

Christofferson has directed both readings and performances of four of Ryan’s other plays, which have all been produced out of town. Ryan has already made arrangements to have *Shock and Awe* produced in New York, but is doing the reading here as a workshop that will give him a chance to hear the dialogue and get feedback from the audience.

“While the play tends to be cerebral at times,” says Christofferson, “it has comedy.”

For Ryan, a former comedy writer, the balance is “finding the right amount of humor,” he says. “You can ruin things by making them too funny. You can ruin your point.”

Although the play is a satire, Ryan says the themes regard “very serious issues about what the hell is going on in the country and what we need to do about it.” He believes doing this reading is a step toward getting performers more motivated. “We’re trying to

encourage people to do more political theater and other types of performing arts as well. Some of us are now starting to talk about how to make this happen,” he says, adding, “We need to get more of a cultural response to what’s going on.”

Meanwhile, Lord Leebrick Theatre Company, which co-sponsors the *Shock and Awe* reading, continues to offer socially and politically relevant theater. Like Ryan, LLTC Managing Artistic Director Corey Pearlstein says “I am attracted to voices that use comedy as a weapon to effect social consciousness.” Pearlstein directs the upcoming production of *How I Learned to Drive*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Paula Vogel that deals with the issue of sexual abuse.

A young woman is abused by her uncle but must find a way to continue a relation-

ship with him. Instead of falling into the victim/perpetrator dichotomy, Vogel says she set out to explore “how we can receive great love from the people who harm us.”

Just as *Shock and Awe* is constructed to revisit 1960s idealism, Vogel also sets *Drive* in the ’60s, when the sexual revolution was just beginning. The audience is taken on a journey of how Li’l Bit, the young woman, finds her path of peace during a series of driving lessons.

How I Learned to Drive opens June 4 at Lord Leebrick.

Vogel’s *Drive* will be the last show for Pearlstein, who will make his Eugene exit in late July, almost three years to the day after he made his entrance. Pearlstein’s replacement, Craig Willis, takes on his new MAD role in early July.

Willis has just wrapped up his PhD in theater from the UO and also earned his MFA there. Although he was a student here, he was pretty busy earning those degrees and his life remained in Seattle, where he returned most weekends. Now, he says, he looks forward to “finally living in Eugene.”

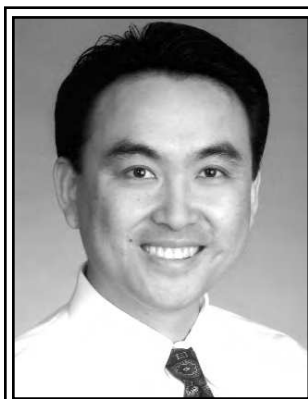
But Willis is no stranger to the Lord Leebrick. He was originally slotted to direct *A Winter’s Tale* for LLTC’s second Shakespeare show, but was unable to do it at the last minute. “One of the advantages I have coming in is knowing at least the names of many people, and some I actually know,” he says.

Willis’s background is in directing, teaching and in children’s theater.

His directing credits for the UO are impressive. In 1994, he directed a well-received production of Molière’s *The Learned Ladies*. He returned as a guest artist to direct Noel Coward’s *Design for Living* in 1997. And, more recently, he directed Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

In addition, he’s worked for Seattle Children’s Theatre, California Theatre Center, Sunnyvale Summer Repertory, and as tour manager for the Dayton Ballet. He has also directed for fringe theater companies and community theaters in Washington, California, and Ohio. His production of Terrence McNally’s *Noon* was honored as a “hot ticket” feature, garnering an encore in the Best Of the Seattle Fringe Festival in 1995.

“We need to get more of a cultural response to what’s going on.”
—Cheyney Ryan



NOW ACCEPTING NEW PATIENTS

Oregon Family Dental, PC
John J. Park, DDS

*“Providing quality care
with a gentle touch.”*

344-7900 • 11th & Chambers • Eugene 

Nude Recreation

Secure Recreational Facility swimming, tennis,
camping, volleyball, hot tub, sauna & more

The Willamettans

A Family Nudist Park

Call (541) 933-2809 www.efn.org/~willies • Affiliated with American Association for Nude Recreation