

Barbara Embree & Elena Stylosin, Lord Leebrick's *Far Away*.



Dramatic Nights

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BY ARIA SELIGMANN

The ebbing of winter's darkest days becomes apparent as the new theater season lights up playhouses around town. Like rich, thick stews that warm to the bone, several companies offer compelling dramas that audience members can sink their teeth into.

Only a few are noted here, but please check *EW* weekly for updates and reviews. Eugene is truly blessed to have so many theater companies, each with its own niche and offerings. Please support them.

An exciting note sounds as Willamette Repertory Theatre offers a Eugene O'Neill work that personifies Artistic Director Kirk Boyd's dream of offering high quality American works.

A Moon for the Misgotten is O'Neill's final, comic-tragic play, written in 1943, not long after *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, as a eulogy to his brother James.

"O'Neill had just finished *Long Day's Journey into Night* and felt he hadn't given Jamie just due in how much he loved his mother," says Boyd.

O'Neill created a meaty woman's role in the character of Josie, and he also called the work *The Moon Bore Twins* because of Josie's story.

Set in early September 1923, the plot revolves around Josie Hogan, a big, strong farm girl — O'Neill called for her to be about 5'11" and 180 lbs. He created her as a spitfire Irish woman with an Irish pig-farmer father who's a shrewd character. But

it's the relationship between Josie and James Tyrone, their alcoholic landlord, that is the center of the story.

In this production, Tony DeBruno (last seen in WRT's *Art*) is James Tyrone Jr., Dennis Robertson is the contentious Phil Hogan, Michelle Morain is Josie, and Jeff Pierce doubles as Mike Hogan and T. Stedman Harder.

Although Morain's Josie is not the overpowering Earth Goddess O'Neill described, Boyd interprets O'Neill's size requirements to mean Josie should be a woman of character — not an ingenue.

Boyd calls the lyricism of O'Neill's writing "pure American poetry." But it's not all wine and roses. Although the play begins on a light note and has a healthy dose of comedy, it still hangs heavy in the end.

"The agony of this play is in those moments where Josie and James come so close to connecting," he says. "If they could just talk to each other and just do it, but they're both so wounded they can't."

In this play where nothing is as it seems, where the romanticism of a moon hangs over the action, two souls fail to love. Therein lies the tragedy.

The lesson is, "Be brave," says Boyd.

As in the play, there is an element of pathos within the mounting of this production, but a note of magic resides in it as well.

Before he founded WRT, when he was with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival,

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