

Find the Time

January's theater line-up is packed with must-see shows. By Sharleen Nelson

A play-within-a-play and an American classic take center stage in mid-January.

David Mamet's *A Life in the Theatre* opens Jan. 14 at Lord Leebrick. Mamet's brief stint as an actor provided him with fodder for this early work, which centers around the relationship between two repertory actors: Robert, an actor at the end of his career, and John, his younger, less experienced protégé. This bittersweet comedy follows their friendship and rivalry onstage and behind the scenes as they discuss acting and life from their differing perspectives.

"It's about what happens to two actors," director Hans Christofferson said. "It's funny. There's lots of slapstick, but on the other hand, it's also very affectionate and warm."

Christofferson said he enjoys revisiting Mamet's work, in part because of Mamet's

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gift for writing realistic dialogue with all the "er's" and "um's" included. "Mamet's dialogue is unmatched by anyone in the theater," he said. He also likes Mamet's work because it's grounded in reality. "[Mamet] writes about work, real people, real jobs. And even though these two characters work in a second-rate theater, their work isn't diminished."

Christofferson, who previously directed *Uncle Vanya* and *Nora* at Lord Leebrick, cast veteran actor Ken Hoff as Robert and Bruce McArthur as John. The production will include live sound effects and an additional character, an omnipresent stage manager, played by Sarah Lenn.

Also on Jan. 14, Very Little Theatre opens its production of the classic *Death of a Salesman*. Arthur Miller's seminal Pulitzer Prize-winning story follows the struggles of Willy Loman, a down-on-his-luck, traveling salesman. Willy relives the past in his mind. Estranged from his oldest son, Biff, Willy's job loss further exacerbates his deepening depression.

Salesman has often been described as a tragedy of the common man and a social commentary about disillusionment with the American dream. Surprisingly, director Stephen Speidel views *Salesman* as a message of hope. "The play is so tied up with our culture, of who we are as a society," he said. "But, it's also about the way people really are in families and relationships, and ultimately, the play is a transcendence of struggle to survive and remain intact."



A *Life In The Theatre* opens at Lord Leebrick Theatre on Jan. 14.

As Willy Loman, actor Patrick Torelle "personalizes every line and moment as the character," Speidel said. He doesn't plan to change the script but will expand on the minor and often overlooked characters of son Happy and wife Linda, through small behav-

ioral gestures. Miller's masterpiece remains universally admired after 50 years and Speidel is certain that the play will strike a chord with local audiences as well. "It's the work of great poetry and genius. It's such a primal play," he said.

Play-ing On a Shoestring

Lord Leebrick offers deep discounts. By Melissa Bearn

Good theater often comes with a price tag only the solidly middle class and up can afford. But more and more, local theater companies are offering special deals to entice a younger audience and make it possible for anyone to check out a hot play or performance regardless of income. If you're looking for a deal in Eugene's theater world, beat a hasty path to the Lord Leebrick Theatre Company.

"Our mission statement is to use the space to engage the community and cultivate art in the community," said Craig Willis, the company's director. "Part of that should be making the art accessible."

Lord Leebrick has created an innovative program called 20/25 aimed at 20 somethings and people on a tight budget. Any adult making less than \$20K a year or younger than 25 can go to one of the preview dress rehearsals for \$5. They're held Wednesday and Thursday nights before the show opens. On Thursdays, students can see a show for \$8, and on Sundays, seniors get a deal with

tickets for \$10. Usually, tickets cost \$12-\$15.

"The way I look at it is that there should always be at least one or two price options that are roughly the cost of going to a movie," Willis said. "Because that's what a college student is going to compare it with."

Students and younger theatergoers in the know are taking advantage of the discounted rates. At a Thursday night performance of *The Goat or Who is Sylvia?* in October, more than half of the seats were filled with college students and people in their early 20s.

In April the "FLEX" and "Starving Artist" passes go on sale for the 2006 season and the discounts are available to everyone. Last year, the Convenience FLEX 5 Pass — five tickets to regular season productions — was marked down from \$70 to \$55.

In a time when movies and television often serve as the staples of entertainment, the intimate performance space and Lord Leebrick's cutting-edge productions offer a wonderful alternative.

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