

Laughing in the Face of Death

Steve Mandell's poignant comedy.

Eudora can't figure out why she's always the first to arrive at dinner. "You're just an early bird," says her friend Mary, who obviously suffers from some sort of dementia. She keeps insisting that she is going to walk to the beach, even though it's 60 miles away. Frank has a crush on Lil, but she's "done with all that." Small details are important in *Dinner at the Old Folks Home*, an original one-act by local playwright Steve Mandell showing at the Very Little Theatre.

Mandell says he got his inspiration for this play after spending a lot of time visiting his mother in a retirement home and interacting with the people there. "As people get older, they become who they are and more," he says.

So it's no surprise that the personalities of the characters in "Dinner" are extreme. Bessie (Darlene Moyer) loves to gamble and is not afraid to ask for what she wants. On "Cowboy Day," she comes equipped with a gun, flask and sparkly cowboy hat. Eudora (Eileen Peterson) is wide-eyed, whiny and confused. Frank (Bob Loudon) is a charming gentleman.

Mandell says a central theme is the "mystery of time" and wanted to show how it

moves slowly in a retirement home. For example, Eudora has only lived there for three weeks, but it seems like it's been years. Her son visits often, but she feels like she never sees him.

Another theme Mandell addresses in the play is the lack of interaction between the elderly residents and the young staff of a retirement home. It's evident that the staff and the residents don't understand or appreciate each other, as though an invisible wall separates them. That changes in the end with sincere effort.

It's impossible not to laugh at the quirky personalities of these characters, and all of the actors are convincing in their roles, funny and poignant at the same time. "I feel I'm done with life and my body just keeps on living," says Eudora. When Alan (George Glasser), the young server, asks Eudora where everyone has gone, she tells him they have gone to bed. "But it's early," Alan says. "No, it's very late," Eudora says. She seems to be talking about more than just the time of day.

Dinner at the Old Folks Home is playing May 12-15 on the VLT's Stage Left. Log on to www.thevlt.com or call 344-7751 for more information. **EW**

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See *Kafka Parables*

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Instead of working with a pre-existing script, Director John Schmor gave his students the challenge of devising or creating their own show. The result is *Kafka Parables*: an original piece written by theater students and faculty members at UO.

Based on several different Kafka texts, the show is a completely unique, collaborative effort. "It's a piece of theater that has never been seen before and will never be seen again," Schmor said. "The focus of the show itself is 'the life that Kafka lived in Prague and the loneliness and alienation that comes with that life.'"

Though *Kafka Parables* is based on Franz Kafka's writing, it's not a play but instead, a series of parables that relate to each other tangentially. The plot is not linear and requires individual interpretation. "We are asking the audience to imagine with us," said Schmor, who believes that their interpretation of Kafka will "surprise" people who have only read his work. Kafka's best-known work is the dark novel, *The Metamorphosis*, but the *Kafka Parables* plays on his dark humor as well.

At the May 19-22 performances, audiences can donate to the Noah Smith Fund as they leave the theater after the show. The fund was created to help offset the rehabilitation costs for former UO student and Robinson Theatre performer, Noah Smith. Two years ago, Smith was in a car accident and sustained serious injuries doctors said would leave him a paraplegic for the rest of his life. However, Smith defied their diagnosis and is currently learning to walk again with extensive therapy.

Showings of *Kafka Parables* are May 13, 14, 19, 20-22, 27 and 28 at the UO's Robinson Theatre. Log on to <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~theatre/> or call 346-1978 for tickets. — Sara Brickner

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