



Measuring hair for King David

Theatrics at the OBF

Collaboration key to glittery pageant

In the Willamette Repertory Theatre's costume shop, Tina Schrage is making hair. Actually, Schrage is cutting long strips of leopard-print polyester fabric, and Andra Barrow, strictly speaking, is making the hair by tying those strips into knots — and more knots, and more knots. Across the table, Caroline Barnes takes bits of plastic egg cartons, found bottle tops (painted black), gold curtain rings and dollar-store gold-colored bling and makes a gorget, a fancy collar, for the king of Israel.

But why are the WRT costume people so busy? It's late June, and the WRT doesn't have a play until September. Yet Willamette Rep Artistic Director Kirk Boyd has been working with actors all week. The answer, as usual at this time of year, comes from the Bach Festival. Everyone is involved in a collaboration stretching from the mind of the OBF's Royce Saltzman to Portland to France and, as usual with the OBF, to Germany.

French playwright René Morax came up with a dramatic presentation of the life of the biblical King David. David, a shepherd boy, may have lived around 3000 years ago. According to the story, God decided that David should become king and, using the prophet Samuel, got him into the household of current king Saul as a sort of bard. Then David slays the giant Goliath and starts winning battles. David eventually becomes king of Israel and has many adventures, including some sexy interludes with a married woman (Bathsheba) and various conquests of territory. Oh, and did we mention the Witch of Endor?

"Yeah, you've got the Witch of Endor, you've got the shade of Samuel — you're going to dramatize that," Boyd says. And when he says *dramatize*, he means something like "set up very exciting special effects that are top secret." Everyone associated with the production speaks in hints and with mysterious glances about those special effects. And for that, we can blame Boyd and Lewis & Clark theater professor Michael Olich, not to mention Swiss composer Arthur Honegger.

Morax had written his play and wanted music for it, but composers including Igor Stravinsky let him know that two months wasn't quite enough time for a composer to come up with incidental music for the entire script. But young Honegger took it on, and the play opened to great success in 1921. For

a smaller stage in Germany, Honegger stripped the play down to a narrator and an oratorio, which became the more often performed version. A few years ago, Royce Saltzman saw a slightly expanded version in

Minneapolis and returned to Eugene with ideas for the OBF.

"It's not accurate to say that I wrote this, but it is accurate to say I adapted it," Boyd says. "What we have here is a hybrid." It's not the original play; it's not the stripped-down oratorio. It's something that uses a narrator but, Boyd says, adds "elements of the actors, scenery, costumes and lighting for the most compelling relationships."

With 18 orchestra members, 50 chorus members and three soloists along with six actors playing nearly 20 roles, Boyd and the stagehand team had quite a challenge ahead.

So Boyd called on Olich — they spent years working together at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland — to create the design. "I looked at how to sandwich the actors between the orchestra and the choral performers," Olich says, and he eventually

came up with a design that lifts the actors up, "almost like they float." Then he and a research assistant looked at what people wore in 1000 BC. "It's historically based," Olich says, "but it's very much stylized ... like a biblical pageant."

Lighting designer Michael Peterson put in a large lighting truss so that what Boyd calls the "Las Vegas biblical" shine can be seen all over the cavernous Silva. German music director Robin Engelen and chorus master Kathy Romey also play key roles in this massive collaborative effort. "The style is super classic melodrama, with large emotions and bold, simple gestures," Boyd says. The OBF has presented spectacles before, but this is something new.

"It's so unique that it's hard to describe," Boyd says, "but I'd like to think that Honegger would be proud." **EW**

Big Cheesy

All Shook Up by songs of the King

Elvis songs! Elvis songs! Elvis songs!

That's really all you need to know about *All Shook Up*, but since this review isn't one of *The Guardian's* "Digested Reads," you might be expecting a bit more info. If you have never heard a song by Elvis (I'm not sure how that would happen, but it's not as if we live near Graceland), listen to a few first in preparation for a couple of hours of relentless Elvis mania.

Yes, there's a plot — a plot like the mutant offspring of *Bus Stop*, *Grease*, *Pleasantville*, *Picnic* and *Bye Bye Birdie* — with a bit of *Grease II* in there as well, not to mention a dollop of *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*.

Confused? Here's the plot: Chad, a self-described "roustabout," gets out of jail in one town (guess which song opens the show) and heads off on his motorcycle for another. When his bike starts making a "jiggly wiggly" sound (cue fainting sounds from the chorus), he stops and asks master mechanic Natalie Haller (Rebecca Teran) to fix it up. Chad wants to jump start the town on his way through — and the town needs lighting up. Everyone seems to be dealing with repression and frustrated desire.

A buttoned-up mayor (Margaret Innocenti) has silenced the entire place with her "Mamie Eisenhower Decency Act" — and she sent her only son (Ben Klute) off to military school, where apparently he learned to be apple-cheek adorable. Home for a few days, the son, Dean, falls for Lorraine (Ashley Apelzin), daughter of local tavern owner Sylvia (Erica Jean). Sylvia's tart tongue fails to hide her admiration for Natalie's father Jim (Tony Joyner), but Jim's about to fall for voluptuous museum curator Miss Sandra (Breanna Carter), who also attracts the attentions of stranger Chad.

Natalie's best friend Dennis (Nick Forrest) is agonizingly silent about his love for Natalie, who, of course, falls for Chad. When Natalie can't seem to get Chad's attention, she transforms herself into Chad's new buddy and sidekick Ed. Will Ed be successful where Natalie was not? Will Sylvia woo Jim away from Miss Sandra? Can Miss Sandra find someone to fall for who's not Ed? Could the audience please not respond with reflexive homophobic laughter when Miss Sandra wants to kiss Ed or Ed wants to kiss Chad? The climactic scene at the old fairgrounds will reveal all.

Chad (Greg Hall, lead singer for local band The Johnson Unit and a tall, skinny Elvis impersonator) should serve as the focus of the musical. But Hall doesn't have enough vocal training or power, and though he has clearly worked hard on his acting, ain't no swang to his thang. Luckily, Teran's pure excellence as Natalie (and Ed) carries many of their scenes together.

Other strong cast members include Jean as Sylvia and Apelzin (whose mom also appears in the ensemble) as Lorraine.



Lorraine (Ashley Apelzin) faces off with mom Sylvia (Erica Jean)

Both possess strong voices and mobile features perfect for musical theater. Apelzin and Klute, who perform competitively together in high school musical theater competitions, move together easily. Joyner is sweet and fairly solid as "Natalie's daddy," and Carter has some good, if melodramatic, moments as Miss Sandra.

Generally, this show serves up slice after thick slice of Velveeta: It's gooey, enveloping and all too yummy. From the full-on hokey chorus scenes (which were highly enjoyable) to the sublimely absurd "statues come to life" set piece for Miss Sandra and Ed; from the doofiest lines ("Feel it in your heart!") to the goofiest expressions (the falling-in-love trope of "One Night with You"), this show bounces from moment to moment with not even a crust of whole-wheat bread underpinning the cheese.

And yet, who cares? I mean really, *who cares?* The silly script by Joe DiPietro no more than scantily covers the body of the piece: **Elvis songs!!** I was surprised people weren't on their feet by the end. Yes, OK, I understand that Elvis would be 72 now were he alive, and that definitely influences the average age of those snapping up tickets for this show, but people, get up and dance. The cast members, often blasting out their lungs (and our ears), deserve a bit more love. To be honest, one night with them and you won't be able to help falling in deeply affectionate like with this schmaltzy, fun musical. **EW**