

# Experimental Storytelling

Ruby brings spirit of cooperation to Leebrick



The Hactor (Hannah Mootz) on the knee of Adelle (Cafe Wolfenbarger)

A mute, armless and homeless woman communicates with the spirit world, and a long marinating script rises up through the energy, passion and excitement of student volunteers in LCC's budget-zeroed yet hugely successful theater program. And then the play moves downtown.

With *Ruby by the River* at the Lord Leebrick Theatre, a cross-pollination begins, driven by the focus of LCC's Student Productions Association (SPA), the hard work of playwright Richard Leebrick and the flexibility of the LLT's artistic director, Craig Willis. But it's a long and winding tale from 30th Ave. to 5th and Charnelton, a tale

that snakes through the corridors of Eugene's theater community.

Many years ago, Richard Leebrick (brother of LLT cofounder Chris) took some theater classes at LCC. He wrote a script that director Benjamin Newman describes as "semi-autobiographical," a script that didn't really see the light of day until Newman and Leebrick met during a reading over a decade later.

"We started trading scripts," Newman says. "He handed me *Ruby*, and I was just blown away."

Then Newman met several students from LCC during the Very Little Theatre's *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. "They have got a dynamite program run by these students,"

Newman says, and he began working with them. SPA president Matt Keating was happy to welcome him into the fold. Newman says, "I casually asked if there was a chance to do any directorial work for the SPA, and Matt said, 'Actually, we have a slot open. Do you have a script?' and I said, 'Actually, I do.'"

The play, staged last November at LCC, was a hit, sold out, with lines of people turned away. Richard Leebrick liked LCC's *Ruby*. "It was exciting to see a piece that had been swirling around in my imagination for 15 years enacted. And the actors who played the key characters were very powerful."

Willis also saw the production. "I was impressed with how the students created an ensemble work, making it work as an experimental play."

So when Newman approached Willis about putting *Ruby* on between LLT mainstage seasons, Willis agreed. Richard Leebrick wanted to make a few changes in the script; the play, some of which takes place in a spirit world, had moved too far away from reality for his taste. "The original

version was stark, almost ritualistic, with lots of poetry. But the spirits had gotten a little out of hand — I had to nestle them back into the shadows," he says.

Some cast members changed roles, and Newman acknowledges that the smaller theater space at the Leebrick also brought changes to the play. "We've had to completely restage it — which is actually exciting. It's almost an insane proposition to take this show that you felt really great about, something you saw touch people, and go back into it and change it — it's been one of the more interesting experiments I've had as an artist."

*Ruby's* changes probably aren't over, Richard Leebrick says. He regards this production — inexpensive at \$12 a ticket, \$10 for students — a workshop production. "I'm looking forward to getting a further sense of the clarity of the story. I want to take this thing and publish it."

But Newman is filled with passion and excitement about the Leebrick production. "It's the wonderful ritual of theater, that human interaction; it's listeners and storytellers, and everyone's involved, everyone's questioning and learning and enjoying. It's an organic, emotional explosion!" **EW**

*Ruby by the River opens Thursday, July 19. See "Opening Nights" for show dates and ticket info.*

## Opening Nights

### RUBY BY THE RIVER

Opens at the Lord Leebrick Theatre Thursday, July 19. See preview on this page. Show dates are July 19-21 and 26-28. Go to [www.lordleebrick.com](http://www.lordleebrick.com) or call 465-1506 for tix.

### THE MUSIC MAN

Opens at LCC Thursday, July 19. Lane Summer Musical Theatre celebrates the 50th anniversary of the show. Lots of actors bring to life the whole trombone-playin', travelling salesman-scammin', librarian-wooin' event. Show dates are July 19-22 and 25-29. Tix available at 346-4363.

### MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Opens in OSU's Memorial Union Quad Wednesday, July 25. Last year, OSU's Scott Palmer adapted *Romeo and Juliet* for modern audiences; this year, he's placing the humorous story of Beatrice and Benedick (whom many of us know as Emma Thompson and Kenneth Branagh from the oft-charming 1993 movie) in the era of WWII. We're looking forward to the Rosie the Riveter costumes and the swing dancing, personally! Show dates are July 25-29 & Aug. 1-5. Tix are available at [www.bardinthequad.com](http://www.bardinthequad.com) or by calling (541) 737-2784.



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[www.lanecc.edu/perarts/musicman](http://www.lanecc.edu/perarts/musicman)

THE MUSIC MAN

Produced by Ron Bertucci & Jim Greenwood

Directed by Jack Watson

Choreography by Marco Davis

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