

All Together Now

ACE's *Seussical* a family affair

The theater is a mess, with scripts lying about, costumes exploding out of one corner and vocal warmup out of another. Dinners are being pulled out of boxes and bags, calculus homework shoved aside for Subway sandwiches. And children are everywhere because Actors Cabaret Artistic Director Joe Zingo is churning through the chaos that will soon be the second incarnation of *Seussical*.

Zingo hasn't changed since I worked with him in high school. With the exception of some grey hair and second helpings of gravitas and wisdom, his manner in the theater is much the same as always. One minute, he's with the costumes, the next hollering at the lights — and all the minutes, he's loving his work. Zingo is gentle and loving when speaking of his cast, but he's not about to let them get away with missing a cue. For the last three years, Actors Cabaret has made it a policy to promote family shows and casts, but *Seussical* is the grandest of all: The musical boasts 12 families working in the cast and crew.

The kids pull the parents in; most of the parents admit to being dragged into theater by their children. One mom said her son threatened to move away from home if she didn't audition. Another found herself cast in a play after singing at an audition to ease her daughter's jitters. That's not to say these are totally normal parents. While one mother gave me the low-down on her daughter's blooming career in Portland, another called my attention away to watch her daughter's solo. Some parents have even been known to creep out of position on stage to get a better view of their child as they perform.

Zingo and Jim Roberts, ACE executive director and producer, actively support family participation. Be it carving out an extra role in the chorus for a grandpa or making the theater accessible for the wheelchair of a talented younger sister, Zingo and Roberts are up for it. Extra family members are always welcome at

rehearsals. And after a few years in the audience at rehearsals, even the most reluctant parent will eventually take the stage. According



The families of *Seussical*

to Maida Belove, this support of families is not always altruistic. After her husband, Bruce McCarty, announced that he wouldn't be doing another play because it was taking too much time away from his family, Roberts called and asked Belove if she and the kids would like to be in the next show. They've been there ever since.

ACE is home to a host of teens. Many of them started as kids, going in for the summer workshops or classes and staying. They have grown up together and are mentors to the next crop of hopeful 10- and 11-year-olds. Hannah Troxel, who has done 11 shows at Actors Cabaret, rehearses three hours a night, four days a week for each show. With those hours, it is no wonder parents choose to join the crowd. (And what parent doesn't want to make sure the kids aren't doing any of the stupid things we used to do?) But not all of the teens encourage their parents to audition or even help sort out the costumes. This is their

space, and they have created a family of their own choosing.

This kind of theater promotes family values — hard work, dedication, families working together to achieve a goal. They even sing songs while gathered around a piano. According to the cast of *Seussical*, performing

together improves the family dynamic at home. Father and daughter Ashley and Stew Apelzin found it hard to carve out time together in their busy daily lives. By participating in his daughter's chosen pastime, Stew is able to be present but not in the way. The Moeller-Johnson family recently found themselves singing numbers from *Seussical* on the side of the road when their car broke down outside of Grant's Pass. And Tyler Holden's family was created in the Cabaret, when he met his wife five years ago in the company's production of *Hair!*

ACE puts out shows at a dizzying pace, which means these families have a number of opportunities to perform. Ben Klute, a high school junior and ACE regular, says *Seussical* is the perfect show to incorporate kids because it allows younger audience members to relate. Zingo seconds that thought: "What better way for families to be entertained than by families?"

Seussical opens Friday, Sept. 28. **EW**

Opening Nights

The Pillowman

Opens Sept. 28 at the Lord Leebrick Theatre.

This Martin McDonagh *tour de force* melds shockingly funny moments with equally (or more) shockingly violent and terrifying scenes, mixing a story about the power of the state with the power of the pen and the responsibilities embodied in creativity, not to mention the wellspring of that creativity. Or maybe it's all an elaborate joke; who would believe this story, anyway? Buy tickets quickly; this play that sandblasted audience sensibilities in New York a few years ago and Portland at Center Stage last year doesn't run for long, and the Leebrick's a small theater, which should make the play that much more powerful. Show dates are Sept. 28-29, Oct. 4-7, 11-14 & 18-20. Tix available at www.lordleebrick.com or 465-1506.

Seussical

Opens Sept. 28 at Actors Cabaret of Eugene. Show dates are Sept. 28-29, Oct. 5-6, 12-13, 19-21 & 26-28 and Nov. 3-4 at ACE & Nov. 9-10 at the Hult. Tix available by calling ACE at 683-4368 or, for the Hult, at www.hultcenter.org or 682-5000.

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