

Shakespeares in the Parks

Two comedies in the fine out of doors

Twins and puppets and music, oh my!

Puppets, visual aids and a wild mixture of music anchor the Roving Park Players' outdoor presentation of *The Comedy of Errors*. The young theater company makes Shakespeare accessible with a stripped-down manner and nothing to distract from the action.

Hilarious and entertaining, the production includes several unexpected turns, including silent pieces (*lazzi*) between scenes, which the actors perform wearing handmade masks. One of the *lazzi* incorporates a member of the audience.

The most entertaining bit of the play, which presents several instances of mistaken identity, is undoubtedly Bob Glasser's all-too-brief portrayal of Dr. Pinch, a conjuring schoolmaster who wears a white doctor's coat, a neon pink and green necktie and a black derby hat. As others speak in the scene, he repeatedly glances up at the sky and silently speaks to a specter unseen to the audience. He ends one of his scenes with a throwback to *The Wizard of Oz*, murmuring "What a world!" as he melts.

Other highlights include Katelyn Bruhn as Adriana and Kella Hanna-Wayne as her sister, Luciana. Each project and deliver their lines with clarity and the right amount of emotion — some of the best acting in the production. The two also charm the audience with a *capella* duets, singing certain lines together or in a round. The play is intermixed with various forms of music, including recorded tunes blasted from the sound system behind the audience.

Director Vicki Harkovitch encourages much improvisation, and the company appreciates this freedom. Sam Hediger as Antipholus of Syracuse and Seth Hansen as Dromio of Syracuse employ synchronized slapstick to hilarious effect.

One of the more confusing aspects of the production is the portrayal of the officer of Ephesus by Big Rag Doll (so-called in the program); literally a big, rag doll, whose lines are spoken by whichever actor happens to be holding him at the time. Perhaps this is another way to draw in the audience, but it seems more distracting than anything else. Still, this is a production you shouldn't miss.

Errors continues on Aug. 21 & 22 at Campbell Senior Center's garden, 155 High Street in Eugene, and on Aug. 23 & 24 at Island Park, 200 West B Street, Springfield. For more information, visit www.rovingparkplayers.org — Katie Dettman

All's well that ends with a party

Rumor has it that Queen Elizabeth I, after viewing *Henry IV, Parts I & II* and *Henry V*, wanted more of the larger than life character of Falstaff. "Falstaff in love," she asked of the good ol' Bard, who obliged his absolute monarch with the witty, light *Merry Wives of Windsor*. For the 10th year of Free Shakespeare in the Park, director Sharon S'elove picked the comedy to enliven the evenings of those who flock to Amazon Community Park on August weekends.

As a kid, I attended many plays and musicals in parks, none of which ever included an evening of Shakespeare. The squirmy, whiny kids who talked, ran off to play, bugged their parents for more dinner and generally ignored about 65 percent of the play might explain my experiences — not that I resented the kids all of the time (though I did

wonder if they had gotten to see the Story Lady tell the tale to help them understand the play ahead of time).

I didn't entirely resent them because, hey, it's community theater outside! For free! Which is fun. And to tell the truth, I got squirmy when I couldn't hear the actors (Y'all! You have *no microphones!* Project!), and we definitely ate dinner before intermission rolled around. But in the midst of this good-hearted community attempt at a complex comedic mix of misunderstandings, some of the actors stand out. Stuart Phillips as Master Ford garners the lion's share of inter-scenic applause, for he wisely appeals directly to the audience and understands how to make his character's jealousy seem logical instead of manic. AnnMarie Maurer as Mistress Page provides

many a lively moment, as do two of the other women, Danette Lamson as Mistress Quickly and Sarah Cassady as the Host of the Garter.

But what of our Falstaff, young (deep breath) Joshua David Robert Vernon Gambill? Aside from having the most pretentious name on any Eugene cast list, Gambill doesn't quite have the chops for Falstaff — at least, not yet. The part requires some cynical self-knowledge that takes a few years to acquire. Still, he performs competently, and on the intensely hot night I attended the production, he drew some laughs even from the kids, who often repeated the things he said.

Take a picnic (but save the alcohol for after the show), take your neighbors, take your senses of patience and humor, and you'll enjoy *Merry Wives*. The costumes, especially in the mad heat of August, pretty much blow the mind, and even if you can only hear a portion of the play (sit as close as you can), you'll have a good time. After all, the play ends with a hunt, lots of fairies, a marriage of love and a big party. All good things for the summer. **EW**



A Merry Wife

The Merry Wives of Windsor continues Aug. 23 & 24 and 30 & 31 at Amazon Community Park. Story Lady preshow at 5 pm; performances at 6 pm. — Suzi Steffen

Yes, In Our Name

"Hardest thing you need to watch" returns to the Leebrick



Rebecca Nachison

Tired of Shakespeare in or out of the park? How about an intimate, three-part anti-war play about the cost to women on the home front? You've got it, Eugene.

Last August, a sold-out crowd at the Lord Leebrick Theatre watched as local actor Rebecca Nachison and Seattle playwright Elena Hartwell staged Hartwell's *In Our Name*. That was a one-off show, a preview before the duo took the play to the New York Fringe Festival, where it garnered positive reviews and was picked up for publication by New

York Theatre Experience in the anthology *Plays and Playwrights 2008*. The women, who make up Iron Pig Presents (www.ironpigpresents.com), then took the play to Seattle, appearing at Live Girls! Theatre in late January. Now it's back in Eugene for the weekend of Aug. 22-24, retooled to match current events, and with its actors hoping for more community engagement this time around.

Hartwell and Nachison note that there are many reasons to keep on performing the play beyond the fact "we're still in it," Hartwell says, where "it" equals the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

For one thing, a play like *In Our Name* provides a different angle to deal with the fact that our country is at war. "People get fatigue, and they don't want to look at the headlines," Hartwell says, "but that is so different from sitting in a room with a living person creating a character."

For her playwright's perspective, she says, she did a lot of research and interviewed a lot of veterans and their families to make the play more real. "I always say that a million deaths is a statistic, but one death is a tragedy. We are open to hearing individual stories, and theater does that in such an electronically unmediated way."

Nachison says that even though she doesn't have family members serving in Iraq, she knows that an actor has to stretch beyond her own experience. "I see it as part of the artist's job. You can be an actor because you sit in empathy and compassion with everything around you," she says.

Last August, Hartwell says, a lot of people stayed after the play because "they needed to talk." So this year, Hartwell and Nachison worked with various groups and activists in Eugene to invite guests for talkbacks after each of this weekend's three performances. "That was one of my dreams," Nachison says, "to have some community dialogue going on."

On Friday, Aug. 22, the talkback features local peace activist Peg Morton and Sara Rich, mother of Army Specialist Suzanne Swift, who refused to redeploy to Iraq after being sexually harrassed and assaulted. Saturday night, those who stick around can hear from and talk to Rich Klopfer of the Justice Not War Coalition and Bob Watada, father of Lt. Ehren Watada, who refused to deploy to Iraq because he believes the war is illegal (see our cover story from March 22, 2007). Finally, the Sunday matinee crowd gets to speak with Bill McCollum, who runs Hope for Our Heroes, a group that strives to make sure veterans get the support they need.

If you saw the play last year, Hartwell and Nachison want you to know that it remains relevant, partly because Hartwell rewrote one section to make a lot more references to Afghanistan (where, the two

emphasize, those troops that are touted as pulled from Iraq are now going) and to the presidential election.

Worried about the content? Hartwell says, "I think human beings' knee-jerk reaction is that 'I can't deal with other people's drama,' but when you're in the room with them, that compassion is there. Human beings are compassionate if it is asked of them." And Nachison says that last year, friends who thought they wanted something "entertaining" came to see *In Our Name* and were glad they did.

Hartwell remembers one of her favorite comments, from a person in New York who said, "It's the hardest thing I ever needed to watch." —Suzi Steffen

In Our Name runs Aug. 22-24 at the Lord Leebrick Theatre. Tix at www.lordleebrick.com or 465-1506. Profits from the run will go to Veterans for Peace.

Opening Nights

The Gin Game opens Friday, Aug. 22, at the Cottage Theatre in Cottage Grove.

The gin game? Weren't most of us playing that, or its sister the gin and tonic game, when the sun was firing 100-degree days at Eugene last week? Hm. But this 1978 Pulitzer Prize-winning play focuses on the card game, a game of wits, a game of humiliation and some seriously intense memories — all set in a nursing home. Show dates are Aug. 22-24 & 29-30. Tix at www.cottagetheatre.org or 942-8001.