

about the farmland in Eastern Oregon and Washington, so the play feels like it's set in our backyard — a large, open, dangerous backyard.

Swanson says she didn't know anything about Eastern Washington when she started reading the book. "I have a fascination with farms, our relationship to land and to the food that we grow," she said in a phone interview from her home in Austin, Texas. "The play's really about a mistake that was made, that we're working out together."

Both Lewis and Swanson say their plays weren't written with any environmental didacticism in mind. The environment "wasn't my agenda," Swanson said. "I fell in love with the people, with the families, and I had strong connections to the idea of home, the place that people run to and run away from."

Lewis, whose biology-minded characters know whereof they speak about extinction, said, "I think [Song's] ecological concerns are talking mostly about our interconnectedness as human beings, how we are to each other, how much we depend on each other." Song director Theresa Dudeck, a Ph.D. student at the UO, said that the messages of the play connect personal loss to the larger world. "Losing someone we love is as final and as definite as losing a species," she said, and Song "interweaves it so that it's not didactic."

Dudeck also talked about the river theme that ended up being part of the scene design. Scenic designer Jarvis Jahner said that creating a design that took into account the needs of both plays — and of the many

other events that take place during the conference in the Hope Theatre space — was a bit of a challenge. And, of course, the design needed to acknowledge the purpose of the festival and symposium, which Theresa May talks about as something that can help influence theater practice in a more green or environmentally aware direction.

"We talked about how both shows contain flashbacks and are evoking memories," Jahner said. "We used that idea of memory to create set pieces that are reused materials; no new wood was purchased for this play." The set, which gestures quite clearly at the style of artist Louise Nevelson, contains all kinds of broken furniture pieces from the UO's scene shop.

Jahner said that working on the set for these shows has already influenced his thinking about design for other shows. "You know, we could build a huge set made of rainforest wood, or we could take a minimalistic approach, get creative with the scenery," he said.

The casts contain familiar faces like Mary Buss, who starred in the Lord Leebrick's *Rabbit Hole* earlier this season, Ellen Chace and William (Bill) Campbell, along with students and other community members. *Song of Extinction* opens Friday, May 22, and plays twice more during the festival. *Atomic Farmgirl* opens Saturday, May 23, and also plays twice more, closing out the festival with a matinee on Sunday, May 31. The playwrights will be at talkbacks after the productions during the first weekends, and there are also

talkback sessions scheduled for the other performances.

Of course, the plays are only a part of the larger festival. Theresa May laughed when she thought about when the next Earth Matters fest might take place. "There probably won't be a symposium!" she said — the symposium contains almost everything, everyone and every topic that can be related to critical thought and action on ecologically aware theater. On Friday, May 29, a day of discussions and performances centering on indigenous peoples incorporates a panel on the future of the Klamath watershed, following a play reading of the Klamath Theatre Project's *Salmon Is Everything*. For high school students, a two-hour panel about greening high school theaters runs on the night of Wednesday, May 27.

Then there are the tall trees of the conference. Keynote speaker Una Chaudhuri, an NYU prof who writes about human relationships with animals, shares the spotlight (though not the stage) with performance artist Rachel Rosenthal, whose face graces our cover and whose legendary status can hardly be described (learn more at [www.rachelrosenthal.org](http://www.rachelrosenthal.org)). José Cruz González, an award-winning playwright and director, leads a playwriting workshop and readings from that workshop. Oregon Shakespeare Festival Artistic Director Bill Rauch joins artistic directors from Seattle and Portland, with the Lord Leebrick's Craig Willis representing Eugene as they discuss the theater of place.

During the ecodrama festival, currents of despair, grief, healing and hope combine

with a push to think critically about what, exactly, theater means and how it can effect change, reflect on our history and connect us to each other. "The theater has been behind in this effort," May said. Now, she's trying to jump-start a national conversation on theater and the environment, all from the environs of the new Miller Theatre Complex. It begins here. **EW**

For more information about schedule and tickets, visit [www.uoregon.edu/~ecodrama](http://www.uoregon.edu/~ecodrama) or call 346-4363. A full pass for the festival runs \$75 for nonstudents and \$45 for students, and some individual workshops, performances and panels have single tickets for sale. Watch for interviews with various artists and reviews of the plays online at [blogs.eugeneweekly.com](http://blogs.eugeneweekly.com), and follow us on Twitter at [twitter.com/eugeneweekly](http://twitter.com/eugeneweekly) for up-to-the-minute info.



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PLAYWRIGHT AND DIRECTOR JOSÉ GONZÁLEZ  
LEADS A PLAYWRITING WORKSHOP



SONG OF EXTINCTION PLAYWRIGHT EM LEWIS



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**SATURDAY, MAY 23RD • 10PM • \$5**  
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