

VLT

80th SEASON!

The Very Little Theatre
presents

Humble Boy

An award-winning play

by Charlotte Jones

Directed by Leslie A. Murray

FINAL WEEKEND:

June 11-13

Tickets: \$14

(\$10 for Thursday)

Box office open 2:00-5:30

Wed.-Sat., 2350 Hilyard St.

www.TheVLT.com

344-7751



AMRIVA

HOME DÉCOR AND ACCESSORIES SALE

We have:

Tablecloths, table runners,
placemats, napkins, scarves,
paper goods, and more...

Saturday, June 13th 2009

Northgreen Apartments
Recreation / Community Center
1800 Cal Young Road
Eugene OR 97401

(on Cal Young between Norkenzie and
Gilham)

2:00 pm - 5:00 pm

All merchandise is high quality hand
selected items made in India.



Largest Selection of Asian Groceries

Seaweed, rice, noodles, frozen products,
deli, snacks, drinks, sauces, spices,
produce, housewares, and more.

**We carry groceries from Holland,
India, Pakistan and Polynesia**
Sushi & Asian deli take-out

Graduation Special

**10% OFF EVERYTHING
IN THE STORE!**
* Excluding rice, case prices
and phone cards.
Offer expires 6/17/09

www.sunriseasianfood.com

M-Th 9am-7pm • F 9am-8pm • Sa 9am-7pm • Su 10am-6pm
70 W. 29th Ave. Eugene • 541-343-3295

THEATER BY ANNA GRACE



Jimmy Curry
(Nick Forrest),
Noah Curry (Ken
McClintock)
and Lizzy Curry
(Storm Kennedy)

Cottage Theatre hearkens back to the Depression again

It is hot, dry, still. The air is red with earth and heat as the dustbowl slowly and inexorably suffocates the farming communities of the Great Plains.

The Curry family is resourceful in these hard times, but they are out of water, and cattle won't survive on dirt and wind. Failure is imminent. Until slick-talking con man Starbuck (Eric Christian Smith) shows up, selling rain. Why do the pragmatic Currys take him up on his offer? They desperately want to feel hope again. Or so we see in Cottage Theatre's *The Rainmaker*, a 1950s classic that somehow lives on in 2009.

The drought is mirrored in the character of Lizzie (Storm Kennedy), who is also "drying up." In her thirties and unmarried, Lizzie has exhausted her resources. She's smart and capable but unwilling to play the

games required of women to catch a man, so she's staring down a spinster's life. *The Rainmaker* by Richard Nash, which appeared first onstage in 1954, is a favorite for revival. Why do pragmatic audiences of the 21st century buy what it's selling? While your average Willamette Valley person might not easily relate to prayers for marriage, much less rain, it's likely everyone older than 25 has experienced a crisis of hope. And that is the essential point of this play: Miracles can happen when you let hope in.

Idealized views of folksy family values are about as useful as Steve Weibe's recent Donkey Kong efforts, and almost as appealing. What makes this script so interesting is that the Curry family doesn't work well together. Big Brother Noah (Ken McClintock) is a hopeless sourpuss who believes the kindest

thing he can do for his family is cut them down and cobble their expectations of this world. Young Jim (Nick Forrest) is unrestrained in his joy and innocence, a relentless Tigger to his brother's Eeyore. The Currys don't really come together in this crisis but rather assert their independence and thus rekindle that family fealty.

The staging and set dressing of *The Rainmaker* remind me of an old quilt. Muted colors of sky and earth are echoed in the costumes and lighting. You might ignore a small corner of the stage for most of the production, only to watch it come alive with four men and a fight scene. Director Reva Kaufman pieces it all together with a quality cast, creating something beautiful. Apparently people were cast solely on the ability to act, rather than age, which made for an interesting experience — a bit like a really good high school play in reverse. Once I figured out how old everyone was supposed to be, I was impressed by how well they played it. Similarly, Storm Kennedy was able to act plain, while she is anything but, for all they tried to costume her in burlap.

By a funny coincidence, Cottage Theatre presents its second in two back-to-back Depression-era pieces of hope against the odds. The theater didn't plan to be relevant in the midst of our national economic crisis; it just got lucky. Or rather, we did. With a cast of mostly newcomers, an experienced and innovative director and a pleasant script that appeals to their subscribers, the Cottage Theatre has stuck a balance between crowd-pleasing entertainment and art, one that gives its audience hope. **EW**

The Rainmaker continues through June 21 at Cottage Theatre in Cottage Grove. Tix at www.cottagetheatre.org or 942-8001.

gardening BY RACHEL FOSTER

Scent of the Rogue

Native azaleas in bloom

One of the highlights of a raft trip down the Rogue River a few years ago was the glorious sight and scent of native azaleas that covered some stretches of the river bank. The azalea was *Rhododendron occidentale*, a deciduous shrub that occurs in a coast-hugging strip from Santa Cruz county, California, to Coos County, Oregon, from sea level to 9000 feet.

Western azalea is one of only three native rhododendron species that are found west of the Rocky Mountains. Pacific rhododendron (*Rhododendron macrophyllum*) is the most familiar. This big evergreen is plentiful in the coastal forests of Oregon and Washington and on the western slope of the Cascades. It is easy to grow and makes a nice addition to irrigated gardens. Cascade azalea (*Rhododendron albiflorum*) is hard to cultivate and seems scarce even in its native habitat. I've hiked the Cascades for years and have seen it only a handful of times.

The gem among our three rhododendron species is Western azalea. Like many wild plants it is highly variable, growing from 3 to 15 feet in height and occasionally more. The flowers are generally white with a yellow blotch inside, but they are often

tinged with pink or even red, and range in size from a little over an inch across to nearly 4 inches. This fabulously fragrant shrub has tempted hybridizers for 150 years, primarily in Europe, contributing its perfume to the famous Exbury line of deciduous azaleas and to hybrids such as 'Irene Koster.'

Over the last century, here in the Northwest, a handful of collectors catalogued, selected and distributed some particularly fine forms of the species itself. Today these plants are relatively hard to find in nurseries, but Greer Gardens lists several varieties.

I have two plants I bought as babies from local plant sales. About 10 years on, they are less than 3 feet high, with modest but shapely flowers just shy of an inch and a half across. One has particularly colorful buds, with a strong pink flush and a distinct line of color along the outside of each petal. This is a striking *occidentale* feature that comes through in 'Irene Koster.'

It's a thrill to encounter Western azalea along the Rogue or in the Siskiyou. It is pretty darn nice in the garden, too, blooming quite late in the rhododendron season when most deciduous azaleas



are over. Wild inland and mountain populations grow near streams, rivers and springs, indicating a liking for moisture. But it tolerates periods of dryness between waterings in summer, especially with some shade. It also tolerates soggy soil in winter, and the leaves seem to be less susceptible to the powdery mildew that often disfigures other deciduous azaleas by late summer.

What is an azalea, anyway? Botanically speaking, all azaleas are rhododendrons, so what justifies calling them by another name? There are a number of features that separate azaleas from rhodies, although none seems to be completely reliable. The easiest to grasp is the number of stamens per flower: five in azaleas (occasionally six to 10), and 10 or more in rhododendrons. This works most of the time. Interestingly, the Cascade azalea I mentioned earlier is sometimes called 'white rhododendron.' How many stamens does it have? Ten. **EW**

Rachel Foster of Eugene is a writer and garden consultant. She can be reached at rfoster@efn.org