

Clutter Can't Kill This Mockingbird

To Kill a Mockingbird: The title alone stirs up all the love and controversy belonging to this simply told, complex story. OSF's production starts out on the right track. The set is sparse, with a few weathered, wooden pieces augmented by massive black-and-white projections suggesting the small southern town of Maycomb. Christopher Sergel's clean stage adaptation pulls out the greatest strengths of Harper Lee's novel, character and language, and sets them unhampered on the stage before us.

Bogging down this beautiful story, however, is a cluttered production. The projections were cool, but their overuse was a continual and annoying reminder that I was watching a play. Blocking was often unnatural and complicated, and too much time was spent fussing with set pieces. The strongest scene by far was the courtroom, where projections were limited and movement was dictated by the story.

Regardless, the production contains extraordinary performances. Mark Murphy's Atticus Finch carries the strength of Gregory Peck's memory, but is less glamorous and more real as an intellectual widower caring for two children. Susannah Flood is Mayella Ewell in every way. A brilliant choice was made to cast deaf actor Howie Seago as Bob Ewell. He captures the unrepentant ugliness of the character, and the signing between he and Mayella adds another layer to their complex relationship.

While much of the beauty of the OSF productions lies in the company's commitment to taking chances and trying new technologies, Lee's iconic and timeless story of community and otherness, of justice and murder, would have been better played if left to its own perfect simplicity. — Anna Grace



Ashland's Oregon Shakespeare Festival runs Feb. 18 through Oct. 9; info & tickets at www.osfashland.org



Modernizing Moliere

Crazy wigs, flashing lights and fabulous go-go boots have completely transformed a Moliere classic. Never stuffy to begin with, the 17th-century playwright's *The Imaginary Invalid* has been thoroughly re-booted for a modern audience.

Moliere was writing in the midst of the scientific revolution. New discoveries (the heart pumps blood!) and new inventions (the microscope!) were turning medicine on its head as new ideas mixed with old practices to create a plethora of panacea. On its basest level, *The Imaginary Invalid* pokes fun at the new medical profession and those who blindly follow its fads and fancies. Yep, still relevant.

This adaptation by Oded Gross and Tracy Young is wild, taking vast liberties with the script and story to set the play in 1960s Paris. The idea behind their concept is that when Moliere played on the French stage of 1673, audiences would have had a similar experience.

Gross and Young may have gone a little too far.

Not that I'm complaining. *The Imaginary Invalid* is hysterical. The play is funny on every level, with everything from erudite references to enema jokes. I was laughing so hard I think I probably spit on the woman sitting in front of me (sorry!). David Kelly is delightful as the hypochondriac Argan, and he is evenly matched, if not slightly overtaken, by K.T. Vogt as the trickster servant Toinette. Christopher Acebo's brilliant set is positively teeming with top-notch performances.

The danger in a comedy rollicking at such a dizzying pace is that it can overstimulate audiences, leaving them laughing without much to chew on and making the performance ultimately unsatisfying. Fortunately, Gross and Young have pulled a touchingly human story out of Moliere's original. At its heart, *The Imaginary Invalid* asks us to question how we live during the short time we have on earth. I would suggest you take three of the hours you've been given and spend them laughing at *The Imaginary Invalid*. — Anna Grace

Veteran OSF Actor Flies South

I was sure there must have been a misprint. Flipping through my program just minutes into my weekend at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, I couldn't find Dan Donohue listed among the company members. A staple on the Ashland Stage, Donohue is always in the best plays with some meaty, Shakespearean role to rock.

Dan "Hamlet-Iago-Henry V" Donohue? Gone? What the fair Ophelia is going on here?

I caught up by phone with the veteran OSF actor who's put down stakes in L.A., trying his luck in film and television.

"But why?" I ask, sounding not unlike Cindy-Lou Who. He laughs, joking, "I was ready to take a break

from acting, so naturally I moved to L.A." If the thought of OSF's best and brightest pounding the pavement beneath the Hollywood sign leaves you cold, fear not. This newly struggling actor shtick is all part of his plan.

"I've been at OSF on and off since 1994," Donohue says. "It is a very safe environment to work in. In some ways the safety fosters creativity, but there are dangers in becoming too complacent." And complacency is not an option for a new actor in the City of Angels.

You can't get much further from the pleasantly tiny town of Ashland than the thudding, bright city of L.A. True, both are filled with Californians, but that's where the similarities end. In L.A., Donohue says, "you are forced to constantly work on new material. You have to jump at things quicker, work faster." While no stranger to the city, Donohue has experienced a bit of culture shock. Los Angeles, he says, "rattles you and excites you in equal measure."

Leaving Ashland was by no means a move motivated by dissatisfaction with the company. Donohue has the highest regard for Bill Rauch, now in his 5th year as OSF artistic director. "When I work with him, my work is better," Donohue says. But year after year in Ashland had taken its toll on Donohue. He feared artistic atrophy, and a good workout in a different genre will certainly be preventative. At his core, Donohue identifies as a theater actor, but ultimately he wants to have a long career that crosses the gap between stage and screen.

When I ask about any future work at OSF, Donohue says that he will always consider Ashland an artistic home base. So does that mean he'll be back? He is laughing again, saying, "That's certainly a possibility."

We at the *Eugene Weekly* wish him the best of luck. In the meantime you can keep up with the adventures of this talented fish as he negotiates new waters. His website is www.dandonohue.com — Anna Grace