



## Summer at The Shedd

Hot jazz, cool musicals on tap for OFAM

**T**he Oregon Festival of American Music turns 20 this year, and the celebration is all in expansion and additions, making this one swinging summer for Eugene. On the hunch you're not going to plan your hot months around the massive explosion of *film de l'été*, I spoke with Shedd executive director James Ralph to get his take on OFAM, Shedd Theatricals, *Now Hear This* and what's definitely worth booking early.

*Too Marvelous For Words: Ella, Frank and the Classic American Songbook* is the 2011 OFAM theme. Running from July 29-Aug. 6, it will include five evening concerts, three matinees, free films and lectures and, of course, a magnificent musical. Music director Ken Peplowski is once again at the helm, and fun is bubbling up around him. One evening concert, *Let's Do It! Ella & Louis Jazz Party*, will be "more like a jazz party than a concert," Ralph says, with a bar, cabaret seating and a little audience participation. Ian Whitcomb returns as special guest scholar. While you won't see him performing on stage, Whitcomb has been engaged to give five lectures on the festival theme.

*Girl Crazy* is this year's spotlight musical, a George & Ira Gershwin show that Ralph says captures the "absolute, unabashed silliness of the 1930s musical." Sent out West by his father, a New York City playboy pulls up in the great state of Arizona in a taxi, and confusion, mayhem and love ensue. "This show was written as a money maker," Ralph says, "and includes sparkling numbers," such as "Embraceable You."

The play was awkwardly re-written in the '50s, and then radically updated in 1991 as *Crazy For You*. "We finally found a copy of the original 1930 script by Guy Bolton and Jack McGowan at USC of all

place and are now working on re-synching the music."

The choice to stage *Girl Crazy* is due to Ralph's mission to champion older properties, "giving the community the basis of what the modern musical came from." There will be no broomstick defying gravity, no helicopter landing on stage and no massive marketing campaign — just the simple, straightforward genius of a Gershwin musical.

Played in its shadow will be the quieter, more sophisticated musical *Pal Joey*. Written in 1940 by Rodgers and Hart, *Pal Joey* is based on an epistolary novel by John O'Hara. The show is indicative of a time when Rogers and Hart were growing dissatisfied with the traditional musical. "They were looking for something new, something different," Ralph explains. The show, while having a nominally happy ending, is a little darker and more thought-provoking than other period musicals.

For both shows and most of the OFAM concerts, Ralph has tried to rely on local talent. We are fortunate to be home to Shirley Andress, Bill Hulings and Siri Vik, and at least a temporary home to Eynne Hollens and Matt Musgrove.

To enjoy some non-native talent, there's a whole line up of concerts, as this summer there's no stopping *Now Hear This*. I'm excited to hear Dr. John and Mary Chapin Carpenter; Ralph says you won't want to miss Leon Russell; and Steve Earle arrives July 1.

These are just a few highlights. To really plan your summer around hot jazz and classic musicals, check out the OFAM website at [www.theshedd.org](http://www.theshedd.org)

The Oregon Festival of Music, *Too Marvelous For Words: Ella, Frank and the Classic American Songbook*, runs July 29-Aug. 6 at The Shedd. **EW**

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