

Reality Theater

Trial by Fire Theatreworks gets new digs in the Whit BY ANNA GRACE

You can feel the energy bouncing off the close, black walls like some kind of feng shui game of pool. Stepping around a stack of wood and scooching past seats, I crowd in to watch the construction process for Trial By Fire TheatreWorks' latest space.

Master carpenter Ryan Olson, who I last saw playing an asshole in *Hurlyburly*, wrestles a massive wooden platform. He is surrounded by other actors-turned-construction workers, all of them dressed in theater-regulation black with tan tool belts hanging off their hips.

The smell of freshly sawed wood mixes with the scent of hope. Co-artistic director Emily Hart, exuberant through her exhaustion, drops the six bags she's carrying — and whatever else she was going to do this afternoon — to sit down and chat with me about the playing space emerging at the south end of Reality Kitchen.

Reality Kitchen, in the heart of the Whiteaker neighborhood, is part school, part organic vegetable stand, part library and soon-to-be part theater. Founded by local muralist and life skills educational assistant Jim Evangelista, Reality Kitchen focuses on autism outreach along with arts education for the mentally and physically disabled.

Evangelista says he was hoping to add a theater space just as Trial By Fire began looking once again to relocate. Whether it's kismet or just a small town coincidence, the energy and mission of both the theater company and the Kitchen seem cosmically aligned.

This cubby in Reality Kitchen feels like a found space, and I imagine the rent will be even lower than the ceiling. Flexible seating will enable TBF to perform in a multitude of set-ups. Fire code allows for a mere 40 people in the space, and that includes the chick running the lights along with everybody on stage.

The location couldn't be more ideal. On Van Buren just off Blair, the place is amid all those restaurants you've been planning on going to forever. Pizza? Soul food? Sushi? The briefest of walks will get you there. Cross 7th Avenue and you're at Sweet Life for an after-show treat.

Since Eugene has three well-established theater companies, along with productions mounted by UO and LCC, I had to ask Hart how she felt about keeping another company afloat in these uncertain times. "Fabulous," she says without missing a beat. "We have people crawling out of the woodwork to help." Donations of money, labor, even 2-by-4 beams have been flowing in, along with the artistic commitment of local theater heavies such as Richard Leebrick and Paul Calandrino.

"If you wanna act, if you wanna run tech, if you wanna get involved, stop by," Hart says with down-home sincerity. "Come play with us."

Sound crazy-cozy enough? Trial By Fire TheatreWorks opens the new space at 245 Van Buren St. with *The Mercy Seat* on Sept. 23; for more info visit trailbyfiretheatre.org

Hop, Skip and Jump

A Year with Frog and Toad coming to Cottage Theatre BY BRIT MCGINNIS

In the age of iPhones, it's easy to forget the joy that a stamped letter can bring. When water parks are readily available, swimming in a local lake fades away into memory. With air conditioning, the changing seasons grow less significant in a cultural sense.

A Year with Frog and Toad, the Tony-nominated musical to be put on this winter at Cottage Theatre, celebrates the common joys of life. Folks are proud of accomplishments like getting a kite up in the air. In this world, not much is actually needed to be happy. And that's just fine.

The *Frog and Toad* cast is tiny, five people total. The title critters will be played by Tony Rust and Keith Kessler (Frog and Toad, respectively). Rust was last seen playing Che Guevara in the Cottage Theatre production of *Evita*. His many directing credits include *A Midpuppet Night's Dream*, where Kessler made an onstage appearance as the voice and puppeteer for the fairy king Oberon.

But the linchpin holding together the animal-filled play might just be the multitaskers — the younger actors filling five roles apiece. The list includes Samantha White (last seen in Very Little Theatre's *Follies*) and Melissa Miller, best known for playing the title role in Cottage Theatre's *Evita*. Cody Mendonca, aka Lysander from *A Midpuppet Night's Dream*, rounds out the cast. The three will play birds, squirrels and many other members of the swamp community.

The spritely show is directed by Janet Rust, and it features twenty short, delightful songs (one notable lyric: "This is a marvelous cookie!"). The score is jazzy and light, with pleasant melodies in the tradition of *Singin' In the Rain*.

Although the musical is written for children, the characters face problems that adults can appreciate. Doesn't everyone wonder if a friend is okay when she says she just wants some alone time? No doubt about it, this play should be entertaining for the kids both learning to read stories and their adult chaperones.

A Year With Frog And Toad runs Dec. 2-Dec. 18 at Cottage Theatre; \$16-\$21.



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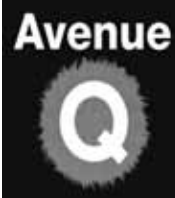
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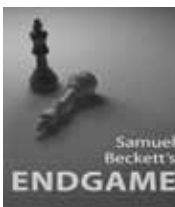
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Avenue Q by Jeff Marx, Robert Lopez & Jeff Whitty
Directed by Craig Willis & Nathan Alef • Opens September 16

The hilariously irreverent smash-hit Broadway musical about real life in New York City, as told by a cast of people and puppets. **Note:** Due to adult language and situations (like full-puppet nudity) **AVENUE Q** may be inappropriate for kids. Though your teenagers will think you're cool when you bring them.

"One of the funniest shows you're ever likely to see!" — *Entertainment Weekly*



Endgame by Samuel Beckett

Directed by Joseph Gilg • Opens November 4

Master and servant struggle for power in the last corner of the world. Beckett blends gallows humor with vaudeville rhythms to create this modern masterpiece. **ENDGAME** stars Ralph Steadman, Tom Wilson, Diane Johnson and Peter Holden. Produced in alliance with Eugene Symphony's Counterpoint arts series.

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The Real Thing by Tom Stoppard

Directed by Fred Gorelick • Opens January 13

Deeply moving and startlingly funny, Stoppard's comic drama explores the complex nature of love, art and reality. Our outstanding cast includes Dan Pegoda and Storm Kennedy in this modern classic.

"A play which reminds you why you go to the theatre and why you fall in love. And why, just sometimes, it is all worth the effort." — *The Spectator*



Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury

Directed by Bobby Vrtis • Opens March 2

A visionary parable of a society gone awry, in which firemen burn books and the state suppresses learning. Ray Bradbury's science fiction classic tells a gripping story, at once disturbing and poetic.

FAHRENHEIT 451 is presented in collaboration with the Eugene Public Library's 2012 The Big Read project. The Big Read is a program of the National Endowment for the Arts.



A Lie of the Mind by Sam Shepard

Directed by Richard Leebrick • Opens May 11

Two families in full meltdown, armed against each other and divided among themselves. Lord Leebrick proudly presents this gritty, darkly humorous American drama by a Pulitzer Prize winning playwright.

"Vibrant dialogue...mad, gutbucket humor...mythic resonance...
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