



Indie Baroque

Ensembles assemble in Eugene

It used to be rare to hear Oregon musicians play Baroque music the way composers intended rather than in the anachronistic styles that dominated performances till the end of the 20th century. Now, it's happily becoming commonplace — but no less a delight. Institutions like the UO and Portland Baroque Orchestra

harbor scholar-musicians well-versed in the styles, tunings and instruments (or replicas) that make the music lean and fleet, and more transparently expressive than it's been in centuries.

But these days, it's not only the big institutions that feature period-instrument specialists revealing the beauties

obsured by centuries of uninformed misinterpretation. This month offers a pair of delicious opportunities to savor these formerly seldom-heard sounds, performed by what might be called indie Baroque ensembles. On Sunday, Jan. 8, at First United Methodist Church, several Baroque specialists convene under the name **Musica Maestrale** to play and sing some ravishing music by Monteverdi, Castello, Barbara Strozzi and other composers from 17th century Italy.

Sunday, Jan. 15, finds the **Oregon Bach Collegium** (including soprano **Catherine Olson**, who'll also sing with Musica Maestrale) at United Lutheran Church, where it will perform 17th century broadside ballads and dance tunes for violin, lute, fiddle, harpsichord and voices. Both concerts should strip away any outdated sense of stuffiness to reveal — and revel in — vivid musical responses to human passions that persist in the loveliness of Baroque music and the instruments that originally played it.

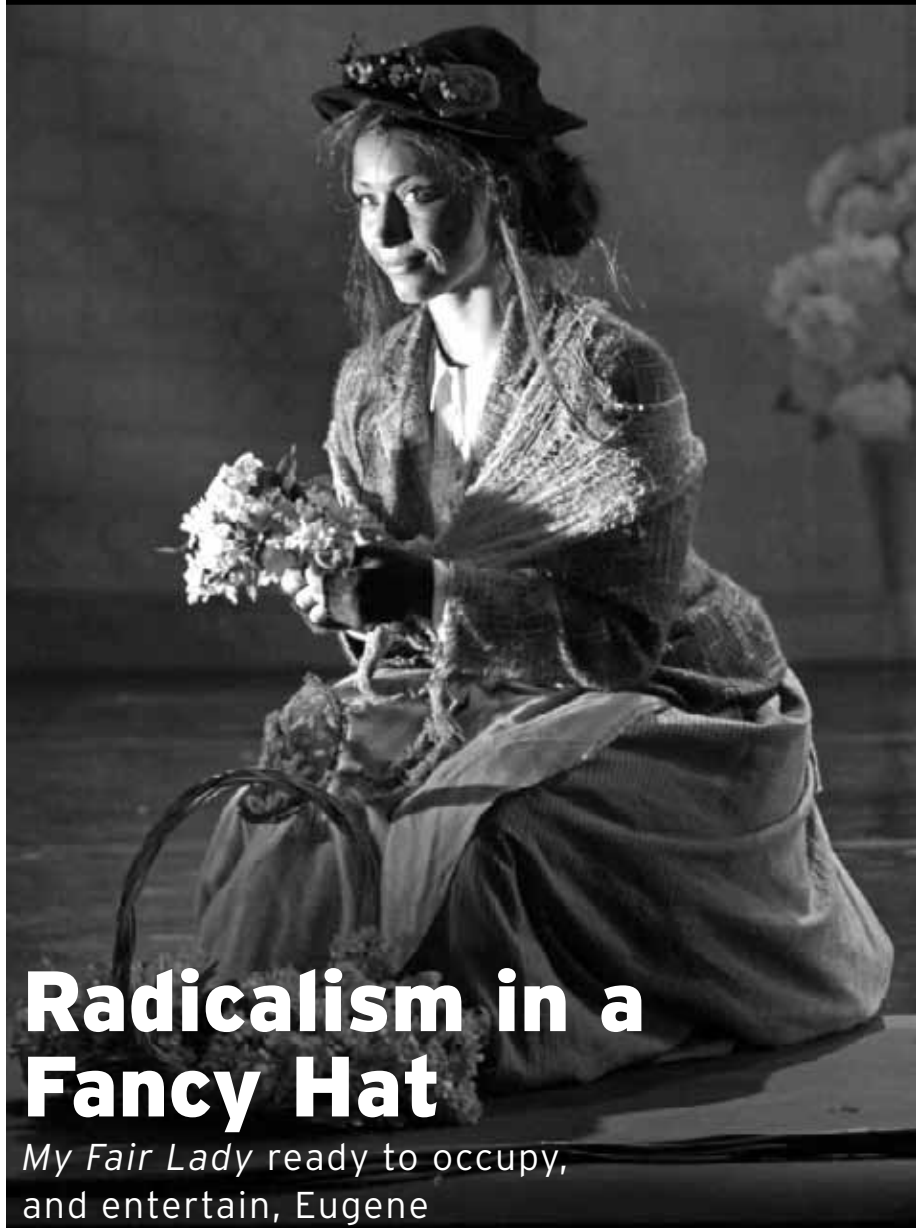
First Methodist is also the site of a Jan. 14 free concert (kids encouraged) by members of the Eugene chapter of the **American Guild of Organists** that shows how those remarkable mechanisms called pipe organs work. Not only will the mighty Hochhalter — which we're lucky to have in our city — be used; also on hand will be a little portative organ similar to the instrument whose agreeably reedy sound graced so many delightful works by Bach, Handel and other composers.

I confess that I used to detest organ music, probably because of forbidding associations with tedious church music. But as innovative 20th century composers like Olivier Messiaen and Lou Harrison and colorful young performers like Cameron Carpenter are demonstrating these days, the instrument is becoming hip again.

Another keyboard is key in the **Oregon Mozart Players'** concert Saturday, Jan. 7, at the Hult Center, when UO faculty member **Dean Kramer** takes the solo role in Mozart's sparkling *Piano Concerto No. 23*. Mozart wrote those pieces to perform himself, and his mature concerti are some of the finest of all his music. The chamber orchestra will be conducted by another pianist, **Kelly Kuo**, an Oregon native currently auditioning for the OMP's music director position. Kuo will also lead the band in Beethoven's not-so-often heard *Symphony No. 2* and Aaron Copland's frequently performed but always welcome music from his great 1944 ballet, *Appalachian Spring*.

Additionally, Kuo will lead a free master class 1 pm Friday, Jan. 6, in the UO music building's Schnitzer Hall, and it's open to the public. Also on campus Tuesday, Jan. 10, at Beall Hall, the superior flute virtuosa and modern music maven **Molly Barth** joins fellow faculty member **David Riley** in a recommended recital of attractive music for flute and piano by J.S. Bach and Paul Hindemith, as well as solo flute works by 20th century composers Robert Muczynski and Andre Jolivet. **EW**

Theater BY ANNA GRACE



Radicalism in a Fancy Hat

My Fair Lady ready to occupy, and entertain, Eugene

"The lack of money is the root of all evil," George Bernard Shaw astutely clarifies. A well-known radical in his time, *Pygmalion* (the stage play from which *My Fair Lady* is taken) was Shaw's biting commentary on class distinction, masked as a love story.

In the play, phoneticist Henry Higgins boasts in his misogynistic way that he can transform a down-and-out Cockney flower seller into a proper lady in three months. The culture clash is on, and it looks like it might be scrappy Eliza Doolittle who will turn the professor's world upside-down. Romance ensues.

Pygmalion was musicalized in 1956 into *My Fair Lady* by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, and went on to win six Tony Awards and spur an iconic film.

I spoke with Dan Sher, executive producer behind this new *MFL* tour, to find out why a 1912 play turned musical in the 1950s is still edgy next to the likes of *Avenue Q* and *Spring Awakening*.

"America right now is at the most polarized I've ever seen," Sher says, referring to the ever-widening gap between the rich and poor. In *My Fair Lady* there is "an underdog element," he says. "You're really rooting for Eliza Doolittle. The power struggle (between Eliza and Henry) is transcendent of time and culture."

Sher says he is particularly excited about the casting. He notes that watching the 1964 film version, one is always aware that Audrey Hepburn is Audrey Hepburn, even when she's smudged up with a few

'America right now is at the most polarized I've ever seen' – Dan Sher

ashes before Eliza Doolittle's glamorous transformation.

According to Sher, Eliza will be played by Aurora Florence, a young actress in her first big role outside of Utah. "There is something really magical about the chemistry in these leads," he says, noting that casting a younger Henry Higgins (Chris Carsten) lessens the "creep factor" of their romance.

As Eugene police have cleared out our own Hooverville ... er ... Occupy encampment, *My Fair Lady* — a gussied up form of protest — sweeps into town in its wake. Shaw, Lerner and Loewe may have employed witty repartee and swooning love songs in place of cardboard signs and a bandana facemask, but the root message is the same: The old system needs to be turned on it's head.

Perhaps we need to make like Eliza Doolittle and take on the system individually, one by one. Because, as Shaw notes, "If all economists were laid end to end, they would not reach a conclusion." **EW**

My Fair Lady Plays at Eugene's Hult Center Jan. 7-8; www.hultcenter.org or call 682-5000.