

# Gala Opening, Grand Exit

Oregon Shakespeare Festival season dedicated to retiring executive director Paul Nicholson

"I wanted to do something more with my life ... I wanted something that would connect with my heart," Paul Nicholson says, explaining how a corporate man from New Zealand came to be executive director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Nicholson has spent the past 32 years supervising the business end of Ashland's world-class theater and will take his final exit at the conclusion of this season.

When I call him up to chat about OSF history and the new season, Nicholson bubbles over with enthusiasm for this year's offerings as well as his past three decades with the organization. He sounds more like a man just returning from vacation than a fellow about to hang up his hat.

"It's going to blow your socks off," Nicholson says about this coming season, which has been dedicated to him.

In his 32 years at OSF, Nicholson has witnessed a lot of change. He's seen artistic directors come and go, or come and stay. He helped navigate last summer's broken beam fiasco (see *EW*, July 14, 2011). Nicholson had a hand in maneuvering OSF from pre-professional status to one of the country's premier theaters. But when asked what's really changed, Nicholson focuses on the scale of the operation as a whole.

"When I arrived, we ran on an operating budget of \$2.4 million," Nicholson says of his inaugural year in 1980. This year they're looking at \$30.1 million. Audience size has doubled.

Most importantly, according to Nicholson, the company has stabilized. "One-third of the company has been with us for more than ten years," he says with obvious pride. From an audience standpoint, I'm happy to know these artists have found a home, but does that necessarily make for good theater?

"Well, we don't make the same mistakes twice," Nicholson quips. But more than that, he says, "Theater is about relationships. We don't have the angst here that other theaters have."

The list of things Nicholson says he'll miss after he retires from OSF is long: "The relationships, the patrons, the board, the sense of being connected to the arts in a deep and personal way."

OSF artistic director Bill Rauch has said that "this season celebrates the adventurous spirit of our company and our audience." Nicholson seems similarly energized about what's in store for Ashland audiences. "I'm really excited about the season," he says. "We're offering a wonderful smorgasbord, and we hope people will fill up their plates and gorge themselves."



PHOTO COURTESY OREGON SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

Indeed, opening weekend offers up a choice of four meaty productions. *Romeo and Juliet* will be set in Alta, Calif., circa 1840, where powerful Mexican land barons attempt to stand their ground as American settlers move in. "The heat of the time and place will really come through," Nicholson says.

*The White Snake* is adapted from a Chinese fable by Tony Award-winning director Mary Zimmerman, whom Nicholson refers to as "one of the great theater artists." Strong storytelling and some serious eye candy should distinguish this dramatic tale of magic in which a snake spirit falls in love with a young scholar.

*Seagull* promises to be another satisfying Libby Appel production of Anton Chekhov's work. With her fingers on the pulse of the 19th century's trademark themes of desire deferred and human fallibility, Appel's adaptation includes lost material from Chekhov's original version of the play.

And what Shakespeare festival would be complete without an offering from the Marx Brothers? All of them, you might reply. Nicholson would not agree. *Animal Crackers*, the classic vaudevillian farce, is "more of a musical, really," he explains, describing how the best comedic actors have been cast in the iconic roles (Mark Bedard, John Tufts and K.T. Vogt, to name a few). "They are having so much fun," Nicholson says.

Variety and innovation continue to pepper this coming season. Other plays include *Troilus and Cressida*, *Henry V*, *As You Like It*, as well as what OSF press materials call a "three-ring tour de force": *Medea/Macbeth/Cinderella*, an adaption by Tracy Young and Bill Rauch of works by Euripides, Shakespeare, and Rodgers and Hammerstein.

In addition to *White Snake*, three more plays will receive their world premieres, including Alison Carey's *The Very Merry Wives of Windsor*; *Iowa*, an adaptation of the Shakespeare comedy. The commissioned pieces in *American Revolutions: the United States History Cycle* continue with Robert Schenkkan's *All the Way* (an examination of the first year of the LBJ presidency) and *Party People*, an aesthetic mix of musical and literary styles that illuminates the history of the Black Panthers and Young Lords. *Party People* is a creation by Universes (Steven Sapp, Mildred Ruiz Sapp and William Ruiz, a.k.a. Ninja.)

Nicholson says that after retiring from OSF he plans on remaining in Ashland, as he and his wife have built a home near the festival. "We love it here, and I want to keep seeing the plays," he says.

Given the firm financial ground he's leaving the theater on, I imagine he continue keep seeing plays for a long, long time.

For information about OSF, visit [osfashland.org](http://osfashland.org)

## SPORTS BY DANTE ZUÑIGA-WEST



FISSION TEAM MEMBER  
CHELSEA SCHWARTZ  
GOES DEEP

PHOTO BY ROB SYDOR  
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# Fission

Eugene's second women's Ultimate Frisbee team set to take off

With the success of the UO women's Ultimate Frisbee team, Fugue, which won the President's Day Invitational this past weekend in California, it's no wonder the sport is enjoying such popularity in Eugene. So infectious is the calling to play that now another women's team is forming.

"With the size and prestige of Fugue, it's weird there hasn't been a B team. And this year is the first year the interest, numbers and organization can really make that possible," says Erin Maloney, coach of Fission, UO's up-and-coming second women's Ultimate Frisbee team.

Maloney is an eight-year veteran of Ultimate Frisbee. She played with local club team Further and has competed in national tournaments. "This is a unique sport with emphasis in teamwork and sportsmanship. We get girls who are interested every time we are out practicing."

With help from Fugue's captain, Christina "Shoes" Shueler, Maloney has put together a base of enthusiastic women who are die-hard Frisbee fanatics. Some are players who didn't make the cut for Fugue; others are dedicated students looking for an exciting four-season sport; some are young women who walked by, saw a pick-up game and fell in love with it.

"We have some very motivated individuals and a very new team," says Maloney.

Fission practices are held at the UO turf fields on a rotating schedule. Though still in the early stages, Maloney says the team will look to compete in a March 17-18 tournament at Pacific Lutheran.

For more information on Fission, send an email to [Maloney.erinm@gmail.com](mailto:Maloney.erinm@gmail.com)