

# SNAKES, SEAGULLS & GROUCHO'S CIGAR

THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE AT THIS YEAR'S OSF

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## TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

A slow, twangy version of "The Roof Is On Fire" plays as soldiers loll on crumbling Assyrian monuments or newly erected scaffolding. Mired for years in a pointless war, the men have succumbed to infighting, jealousy and drugs. Over the besieged walls, a metallic-blond Helen parties with privileged Trojans, while soldiers attempt to beat back boredom.



Director Rob Melrose has set Shakespeare's story of the Trojan War in modern-day Iraq, and no background explanation on either the story or setting is necessary to make it work.

*Troilus and Cressida* is one of Shakespeare's minor plays. It's been more than ten years since OSF mounted a production of this troublesome script, and everyone involved seems determined to make this one work. The cast is strong across the boards. Raffi Barsoumian and Tala Ashe are beautifully clear and compelling in the title roles. Bernard White plays the noble Hector with humility and honesty. Elijah Alexander, Brooke Parks, Barzin Akhavan, Jeffrey King and many, many others give fascinating and human performances in their classical roles.

It's not Shakespeare's tightest piece of work. While there are some great scenes, there are as many meandering monologues and a clattering collection of characters. A number of plots flow simultaneously and occasionally stagnate in baffling eddies. But Melrose's careful staging and quick pacing keeps the production clipping.

Bottom line: This fascinating interpretation will help you complete your cannon.



## ROMEO AND JULIET

The ancient grudge is set in the vanishing world of the landed Californios, as American rule upends the power structure in the late 1840s. A simple playing space of brown and red illuminates the earthy passion of the play. Spiced up with a few easily understandable Spanish phrases, the meat of *Romeo and Juliet* remains unchanged.

Particularly adept at conveying the tenuous privilege of the Spanish-Mexican gentry were Elijah Alexander and Vilma Silva as Don and Doña Capulet. Daniel José Molina was a delightfully energetic and passionate Romeo.

This production is youthful, and almost relentless in its inclusion and illumination of lewd talk. No phallic joke went un-mimed; no sexual reference was allowed to sneak by. Isabell Monk O'Connor nails the nurse's bawdy banter. Jason Rojas' Mercutio mocks Romeo with simpering, limp-wristed affectations that met with mixed reactions.

Bottom line: An interesting retelling of a familiar tale.



## ANIMAL CRACKERS

If you were to take a bad joke, throw an impossible situation on top of it, then add a silly song and dance routine along with a string of puns, you might have a small scoop of the Comedia soup that is *Animal Crackers*, a script that only the Marx Brothers could pull off.

Unless maybe you put the insane script into the hands of a talented director along with some of OSF's hard-working actors. A beast of timing and movement to master, the Marx Brothers had honed their bankable banter and physical shtick for 20 years before the 1930 film *Animal Crackers*; OSF director Allison Narver and her crew had weeks.

Mark Bedard is masterful in Groucho's role of Captain Spaulding. John Tufts and Brent Hinkley are similarly strong as Chico "Emanuel Ravelliii" and Harpo "The Professor."

Providing some dramatic relief to all the zany comedy is a thin plot line, smoothly rolled out by Jeremy Peter Johnson, Mandie Jenson and others. Jonathan Haugen rocks the costume quick-change as both Hives the Butler and Chandler, the newly rich financier. As Mrs. Rittenhouse, K.T. Vogt keeps a straight face and serves as a straight woman to all the jokes whizzing around her.

Whether marveling at how many props Hinkley could pull out of his coat or trying to figure out if a stream of lines were being improved or, harder yet, scripted and made to look like improv, my respect for these actors went through the roof.

Bottom line: If you like the Marx Bros., you're in for a treat, and even if you don't, the pure comic genius of the cast is well worth your time.

A chilles in camouflage, teens swigging poison and reptiles seducing pharmaceutical interns — yep, the 2012 season at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival is up and running. Planning a trip to the idyllic town of Ashland? Consider the following, and then grab your tickets.

For tickets, times and further information about the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, call 541-482-2111 or visit [osfashland.org](http://osfashland.org)