



## Fowl Play

Marist students offer up *Too Many Chickens*

**B**rian, a straight-laced architect, finds himself going nuts as he tries to deal with his crazy family. It's hard to come home to a mom with an enthusiasm for fairies and a mad-inventor father who is attempting to create a chicken vacuum to ease the flow of fowl from pen to truck.

Sound familiar?

Keith Kessler's new play — which opens Friday, April 20, at Marist High School under the direction of Tony Rust — was written for and about the Willamette Valley wackos we all know, love and

occasionally are. "It's a fun play because the characters are all locally real and recognizable," Rust says. "They are the wacky strange people we meet on a daily basis in Eugene."

So how did this fun new script fall into the hands of a high-school theater troupe? Local performer, designer, director and teacher Rust was searching for a spring show. When you consider the issues of cast size, good roles, appropriate themes and language, this becomes no easy task. Then Rust remembered a reading he'd done of

Kessler's script and it came to him: "I have my play!"

World premiering seems to be all the rage right now in Oregon, with Actors Cabaret of Eugene and Lord Leebrick Theatre actively promoting new works, and Ashland's Oregon Shakespeare Festival producing a plethora of new shows this year. Are there benefits to working a brand-new show with students?

Absolutely, Rust says. "The kids are open enough to play with it, and point out any inconsistencies," he explains.

The author regularly attends rehearsals, and while Rust jokingly says "it's nice to have another adult in the room," Kessler's presence has an even greater impact on the kids: When students have questions about character or motivation, "having an actual answer, or at least a made-up answer on the spot, is really cool," says Rust.

Kessler has a long history of working in schools. "Keith has great rapport with the students," Rust adds.

Another plus is what the director calls "a forgiving audience." Parents, friends and teachers make for the very best audiences in the world, and will be able to pick up on the finest aspects of the script.

So whether you want to support young actors, new playwrights or simply are curious about more modern methods for moving around your farm animals, come check out *Too Many Chickens*. **GW**

*Too Many Chickens* plays 7:30pm Friday & Saturday, April 20-27, at Marist High School, 1900 Kingsley Rd., 686-2234.

## Godspell 2.0

The beautiful old Lighthouse church has been reclaimed as a theater as well as a sacred space, so what could be more fitting than opening with an updated production of *Godspell*? New Hope International's creative arts director, Steve Kenny, notes there are several reasons to be thrilled about the new venue and the old classic.

"We have an outstanding cast," Kenny says, noting that several of the actors are fresh from a similar production of *Godspell* that was mounted in Hawaii. Along with the young cast, Kenny says he is excited about tapping the directorial wisdom of veteran performer Roxy Ragozzino.

"There is always something new," Kenny explains, describing Ragozzino's directing style. "She knows the show inside-out and backwards."

The original 1971 musical, a folk-rock expression of the gospel according to the Matthew (with a little help from Luke), has been updated with a "John Mayeresque groove," Kenny says.

And music is not the only aspect of the production that's been revamped. The New Hope Center Auditorium recently underwent theatrical renovation, including stage, lighting and sound improvements.

New Hope International is an organization emphasizing creative arts as an integral part of Christian worship, though according to Kenny: "This is not church; it's a solid theatrical production."

*Godspell* plays April 20-22 at New Hope Center Auditorium, 1790 Charnelton St.; info & times at newhope.edu or 485-1780. — Anna Grace

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