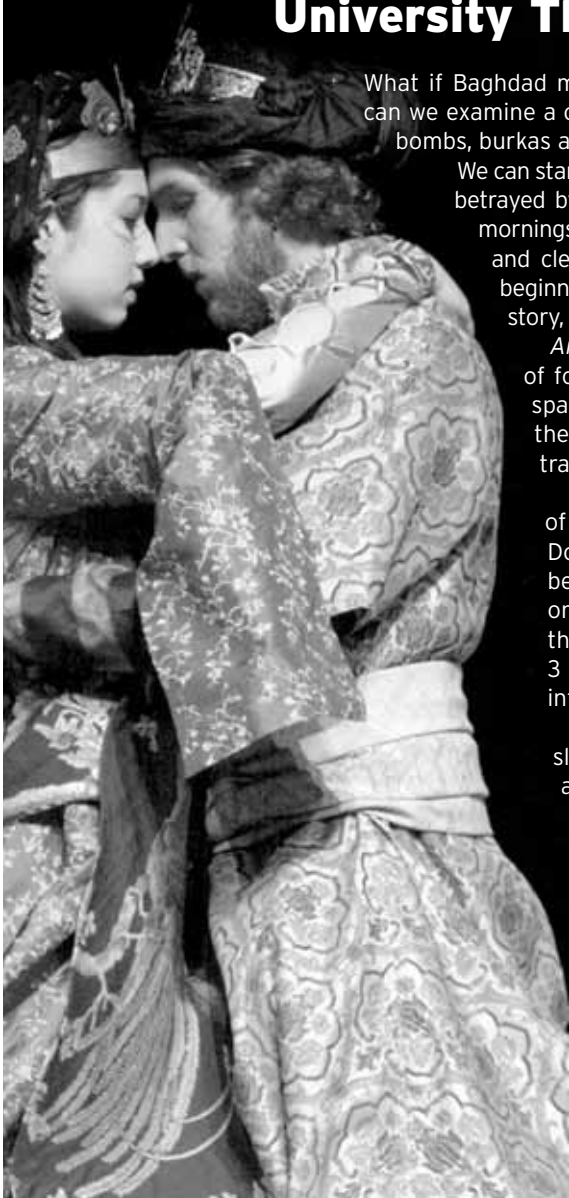


University Theatre stages *Arabian Nights*



What if Baghdad meant "City of Peace" instead of standing as a war zone? How can we examine a culture that mass media have so mired down with images of car bombs, burkas and the occasional Disney-sponsored flying carpet?

We can start with a new interpretation of some ancient stories. King Shahrayar, betrayed by his beautiful wife, vows to marry for only one night. Execution mornings follow wedding nights for 1000 nights until Shahrazad, beautiful and clever, stays her death by tempting the heartbroken ruler with the beginning of a fantastical tale. So long as she can continue to spin a good story, she lives, and keeps other young women from being put to death.

Arabian Nights, or rather *1000 Nights and a Night*, is a collection of folktales handed down from the 9th through 15th centuries, and spanning the globe from Egypt to India. Like Grimm's Fairy Tales, there is no single author, but rather hundreds of years of oral tradition wrapped up in one enthralling book.

This University of Oregon production of a British adaptation of *Arabian Nights* presents cultural blending at its best. Adaptor Dominic Cooke has pulled from the ancient tales a script centered on betrayal and healing that will speak to modern audiences, featuring only six of the sea of stories. University Theatre has adhered to the storytelling tradition by offering a languid production (nearly 3 hours in length) laden with authentic dance, puppetry and interpretive movement.

This ensemble piece features a number of strong young actors slipping through a variety of characters. Jameson Tabor, Liv Burns and Olivia Walton shine among the many bright actors on the stage. Martin Diaz-Valdes handles the authoritarian, if confused, Shahrayar with agility. Maggie Mae Stabile proves an able orator as Shahrazad.

Despite the poster's claim, this play is not appropriate for all ages. Magical and whimsical, it is nonetheless chock full of sex, murder and betrayal; although not unlike your average modern kids' film, I'd recommend this production for ages 12 and up.

Arabian Nights offers an unapologetically new interpretation of a beautiful work of classic literature. Like Shahrayar, audiences are swept away into fantastical worlds while critically examining our own. — Anna Grace

Arabian Nights runs at University Theatre through May 5.

Hollywood, Abridged

"Hollywood's taking over the world," declares one of the cast members during the introductions, and this slightly bemused, somewhat nauseated proclamation sets a nice tone for the freewheeling barrage that is Very Little Theater's current production of *Completely Hollywood (Abridged)* by Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, with additional material by Dominic Conti.

No less than 186 of the "greatest movies of all time" are referenced during this production, which is ably helmed by first-time director Adam Leonard. *North by Northwest* and *Sunset Blvd.* share the stage with *Terminator* and *Titanic*, creating a dizzying mulch of treasures and trash that zips by in the form of trailers, smash-ups and outright satires. Everything is handled by a trio of extremely talented and nimble-tongued actors — Patrick Curzon, Russell Dyball and Tim O'Donnell — all of whom reveal an attractive blend of geeky enthusiasm and postmodern pluck.

Unlike Martin and Tichenor's popular abridgement of Shakespeare's plays, which drags Elizabethan theater, kicking and screaming, into the realm of pop culture, *Completely Hollywood* instead brings pop culture to the stage, where it doesn't stand a chance. Cinematic tropes are torpedoed as the cast ticks off the 12 components of successful movies — "action sells" for instance — and it is here the production really finds traction. Politics regularly intrude, giving the loose-limbed antics an edge; robotic Al Gore and Ah-nold the Governor take a severe beating. As they should, because, per Movie Rule No. 11.5, "there's no accounting for taste." If there were, John Gielgud would have been Prime Minister, and Ronald Reagan would have bowed out after *Bedtime for Bonzo*. — Rick Levin

Completely Hollywood (Abridged) plays through April 29 at Very Little Theater; TheVLT.com

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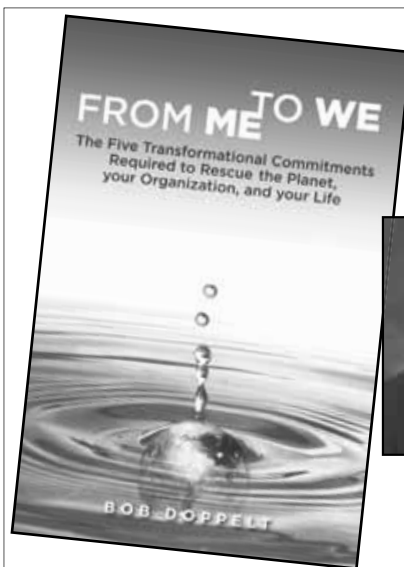
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