

Actors Cabaret Farts in Your General Direction

Some 600 years ago, at the battle of Agincourt, British forces clashed with the French in a field of mud – a carnage of superiorly armored French nobility and their horses sliding to collective death in the soggy soil. Replace the soldiers with a gaggle of comedians, singers and dancing girls, and you have the riotously uncontrolled, hysterically slippery *Spamalot*.

Spamalot, playing through July 7 at Actors Cabaret of Eugene (ACE), is billed as “a new musical lovingly ripped off from the motion picture *Monty Python & the Holy Grail*.” With Python alum Eric Idle handling the book, the script is a nearly verbatim take on the film, with song and dance numbers tucked in at the most iconic moments.

King Arthur (a thoughtful Ken McClintock) and the rest of his “silly English Cunigits” take off on a quest for Christ’s lost cup, meeting up along the way with such less-than-perilous adventures as a battle with the Black Knight, wise words from Tim the Enchanter, and a shrubbery-loving tête-à-tête with Knights Who Say Ni.

ACE has a delicate tightrope to walk, balancing between delivering on our collective Monty Python nostalgia and creating something completely different. Most of the cast delivers, though a few actors overreach in their ambitions to be Pythonesque. Particularly tricky is the role of the French taunter, whose lines (see headline) are as recognizable – and I’ll argue as great, in their genre – as Hamlet’s ‘to be or not to be.’ Cameron Walker flat-out kills it as the feisty Frenchman.

Diva-rific Megan Hammon delivers as the Lady of The Lake; Trevor Eichhorn shines as a not-so-brave Sir Robin. And, as the historian, Bill Furtick offers a sense of order to this chaotic piece of theater. The killer bunny is genius.

Spamalot runs June 22 through July 28 at Actors Cabaret of Eugene; actorscabaret.org or 683-4368. – Anna Grace



Shattered Glass

Among the many tart, tangy pleasures of *The Glass Menagerie* at Cottage Theatre, you can count the thrill of love at first sight – I mean the opening glimpse of director Alan Beck’s set design. Awash in a mauve glow hinting at sepia-tones and rust, the stage becomes a diorama (or vivisection) of Tennessee Williams’ fictional St. Louis flat: The apartment, and all that goes on inside, is viewed through the spiny exoskeleton of the tenement’s beams and girders.

“I was hooked on the idea of an apartment morphing into a prison of the soul,” says Beck, whose design – a gorgeous monstrosity of domestic entrapment and cosmopolitan creep – suggests the tension between intimacy and claustrophobia that drives so much of Williams’ work.

This scenic ingenuity alone is enough to elevate such an iconic American classic. But Beck has also gathered a talented cast to flesh out Williams’ bittersweet meditation on the persistence of memory and the shattering of desperately held illusions. Kory Weimer brings urbane melancholy to Tom Wingfield, the play’s narrator; as Amanda, Tom’s suffocating mother, Gloria Lagalo seethes with not-so-quiet desperation; Nicole Trobaugh emanates angelic heartbreak as Tom’s sister Laura; and Bob Buechler is strong as Jim, the gentleman caller.

These elements, along with some fine flourishes by Beck – snippets of old black-and-white movies, evocative original music by the director’s brother, Jim Beck – work to make this version of *The Glass Menagerie* at once reverent, period-precise and idiosyncratically modern, a faithful retelling that’s also haunted by the playwright’s ghost and tinted by the director’s passion.

“*Menagerie* has always moved me,” Beck says. “If you’ve ever wrestled with the difference between what you dream and what you must do, *Menagerie* makes you re-face that difference. I think those are universal themes that will never die.”

The Glass Menagerie plays through July 1 at Cottage Theatre; cottagetheatre.org or 942-2934. – Rick Levin