

SCIENCE VS. RELIGION

How the World Began *explores the Earth's origins in rural Kansas*

When you inherit the wind, hold onto your hat: You never know where you might end up. Or do you? I'm speaking, of course, about the 1955 play *Inherit the Wind*, written by Jerome Lawrence and Robert Edwin Lee and dramatizing the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial, which pitted prosecutor William Jennings Bryan against defense attorney Clarence Darrow in a Tennessee court case that questioned whether evolution could be taught in public schools up against the supreme word of God. Along with the ritual reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, classroom viewings of the 1960 film version of the play, starring Spencer Tracy and Gene Kelly, has become a public-school right of passage in blue states, where every now and again a combative doctrinaire pupil, with his frothing parents and church in tow, will challenge some poor schmuck of a science teacher teaching Darwin and natural selection from a textbook.

Playwright Catherine Trieschmann inherits the wind in her play *How the World Began*, a three-person play now being staged at the Lord/Leebrick Playhouse by Oregon Contemporary Theatre under the capable direction of Christina Allaback. Whereas the suspense and dramatic oomph of *Inherit the Wind* resided in the fantastic courtroom antics of both attorneys, Trieschmann opts to tone down the rhetoric, sort of, while amping up the personal psychology that underlies a classroom confrontation between religious dogma and scientific explanation.

Micah (Zar Oelke) is a young student in a rural midwestern town recently devastated by a tornado. Although Micah survived the storm, he lost his family and home, and he has been unofficially adopted by Gene (James Aday), an elderly gentleman who, at first glance, seems to have walked right out of *The Andy Griffith Show*. As portrayed by Oelke, Micah is an intense kid, given to terse interrogations that dispense with all small talk. When he hears his teacher, Susan (Mary Unruh), refer to non-scientific theories about the origin of the Earth “gobbledegook,” Micah goes on the offensive. As their after-school conversations ramp up, becoming more and more confrontational, Susan, an unwed pregnant New York transplant, grows increasingly aware of her social isolation.



ZAR OELKE AND
MARY UNRUH
IN *HOW THE
WORLD BEGAN*

Enter Gene, who comes bearing lemon meringue pie for the new teacher only to spring his own agenda on her; with Micah's school notebook in tow, he explains the young boy's difficult position and asks only that Susan apologize for calling Micah's beliefs nonsense. And around and around it goes, until a dangerous act of drunken vandalism/terrorism tips the scales.

Trieschmann has a good ear for dialogue, and for the subtle linguistic nuances that undergird the personal signifiers of class and religious faith. Her depiction of Gene, a well-meaning and childless man about town, is particularly compelling, and the way she paints the urbane but unprepared Susan into a corner is interesting. And yet, much about *How the World Began* seems overloaded and over-determined: pregnant unwed mother, meddling Barney Fife-type and *Slingblade*-ish overwrought teenager vie for understanding and an upper hand, and along with the great stakes come too many unresolved moments sprung willy-nilly (what up with that surprise ending?). To locate the sources of religious fanaticism in Freudian trauma — and, what's more, to make that trauma something of a shaggy dog story — seems to defeat the purpose of a play that begs for us all to get along. — *Rick Levin*

How the World Began runs through March 24 at Lord/Leebrick Playhouse; \$15-\$26.

SHE'S GOT YOU

Actors Cabaret would like to introduce you to Patsy Cline

“There's just no one who can touch her. Hell, I hang on every line,” Jimmy Buffet once sang of Patsy Cline. She is so much more than the first female country singer to headline her own tour, to perform at Carnegie Hall and to truly break down barriers of gender in country music. She is more than a tragic legend of young talent, villainous prompters and a cheating husband. She is a voice so strong and soulful you begin to wonder why you ever bothered listening to anyone else try to sing.

Always ... Patsy Cline is a narrow slice of the singer's life, as seen through the eyes of a fan. While there was enough drama in Cline's life for six or seven plays, this show focuses strictly on how Cline and her music make us feel.

The script is taken directly from an Ellis Nassour interview of Louise Seger. Seger was hooked the first time she heard Cline sing; in 1961 she approached the singer at a ballroom, the two got to talking and wound up eating bacon and eggs in Seger's kitchen after the show, sharing stories until four in the morning. From there, the two corresponded until Cline's death in 1963. It's a great little story, and one that was not unusual in Cline's life. She was chummy with fans, and her letters reveal an easy familiarity and honesty about her troubled marriage, the ups and downs of touring and the heartbreak of trying to balance a career with young children.

Originally conceived and directed by Ted Swindley, the play is less about Patsy Cline and more about how she has affected us. It's like a one-woman show, played by two women simultaneously. Sue Schroeder-White does nearly all the talking as Seger. With lines like, “Hall fell through his asshole and nearly hung himself,” Schroeder-White manages to channel the aging fan as she shares her favorite memories of Patsy Cline. As Cline, Michelle Sellers has few lines, but also has the task of recreating Cline's magic over the course of 25 songs. According to ACE producer Jim Roberts, the Cabaret chose this play because in Sellers, they had a woman who could sing it. Sellers is remarkable. She has the whole audience swaying and singing along.

This piece of musical theater is a sweet walk for a Patsy Cline fan, and a nice way to meet her for those unfamiliar with her material. It's not an exciting evening of theater, but rather a humorous meditation on the grace and strength of an incredible woman. — *Anna Grace*

Always ... Patsy Cline runs March 15, 2013, and plays Friday, Saturday and select Sundays through April 13; \$16-\$41.95. See actorscabaret.org for details.



MICHELLE SELLERS
AS PATSY CLINE

A NIGHT OF SPUDS AND SHTICK AT TSUNAMI

The Actors' Table of Eugene (T.A.T.E.) is showcasing some of the best comedy for women ... and potatoes. This installment of Eugene's eclectic readers' theater will feature some sort of spud in every offering. Local actresses will read from their favorite comic pieces, and so long as there's a potato involved, it's no-holds-barred on the material.

There are two changes to the usual run of events. Due to overwhelming popularity, *Potluck: T.A.T.E.'r Salad* will be running two nights, instead of just one. And to avoid the last minute crush and frustration of not getting a seat, you can make your donation and grab your tickets online ahead of time at wkly.ws/1fm — *Anna Grace*

Potluck: T.A.T.E.'r Salad starts at 8 pm March 15 & 16 at Tsunami Books, 2585 Willamette St.; \$5-\$10.