

VLT

85th SEASON!

The Very Little Theatre
presents in
STAGE LEFT:

The Other Place

by Sharr White

A psychological mystery,
directed by Gerald Walters

May 2-4*, 8-11*

*Sunday matinees

Special Benefit Performance for
Alzheimer's Assn. on May 1

Tickets: \$10 General Admission

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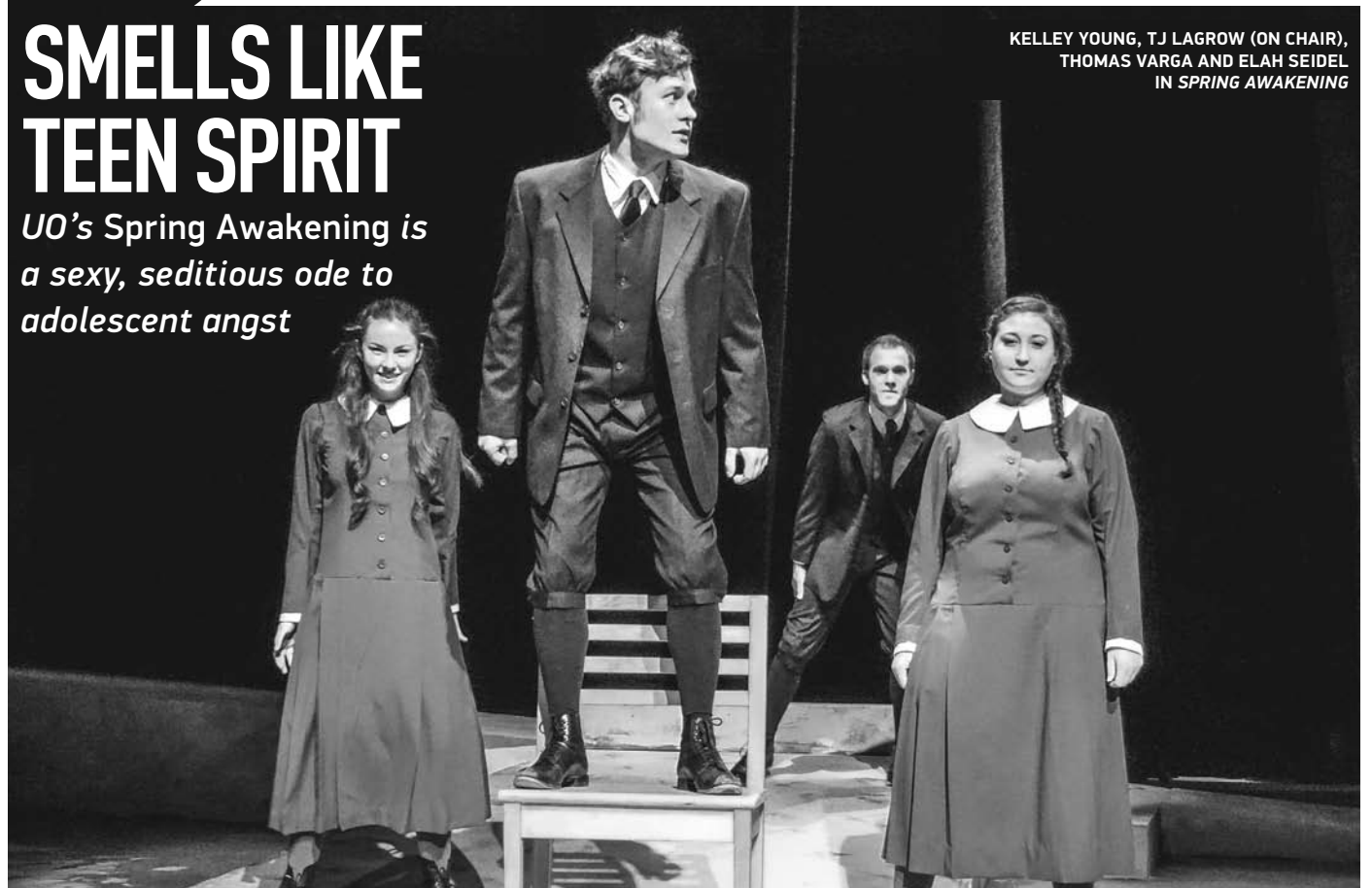
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THEATER

SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

UO's Spring Awakening is
a sexy, seditious ode to
adolescent angst

KELLEY YOUNG, T.J. LAGROW (ON CHAIR),
THOMAS VARGA AND ELAH SEIDEL
IN *SPRING AWAKENING*



Is it just me, or is the Eugene theater scene undergoing something of an ascendance these days? Is there a minor renaissance of the dramatic arts going on in our midst? Could it be that, along with the hip, new vitality of our downtown, pushing out decades of apocalyptic slouch and economic zombification, this city is also experiencing a similar surge in creative endeavors and the venues that host them?

The reason for this reverie is the happy glow I'm still experiencing after attending the April 25 opening night performance of University Theatre's fantastic production of *Spring Awakening*, the 2006 rock musical based on the controversial 1891 play by German writer Frank Wedekind. Hats off to UO on this one, and a special nod to director John Schmor. Schmor, who heads the school's theater arts program, reveals an admirable level of artistic courage in bringing this timeless story of teenage sex and death to the stage.

Schmor is aided and abetted by a talented cast that shows unflinching passion and professionalism in portraying the ravaged forms of teenaged vulnerability, from mopey suicides and incest victims to atheistic punks and coming-out homosexuals. T.J. LaGrow and Kelley Young are riveting as Melchior and Wendla, the star-crossed lovers whose sexual explorations are tender and

doomed, and Thomas Varga hits just the right note as Moritz, the play's Hamlet, a young man haunted by the advent of adult life in all its contradictory complexity. And these actors are not alone; each performer hits the mark, creating an ensemble vibe that crackles with the edgy existential radiance, equal parts agony and ecstasy, that accompanies the pains of growing up — a sometimes deadly game.

The real triumph of this production is the music. The songs, with music by Duncan Sheik and lyrics by Steven Sater, are smart and catchy (no small feat for a rock musical), and a live band adds an appropriate sense of urgency to the teenage wasteland on stage. Despite a few sound glitches having to do with uneven amplification, the vocal performances were spot-on. "Totally Fucked," a rollicking anthem to adolescent double binds, has the power to bring down the house, and almost did.

Confident, sophisticated and shot through with the angst, hyper-sexualized haze of adolescent confusion, UT's staging of *Spring Awakening* is a reminder of how good live theater can be, even — or especially — when it makes us squirm. — *Rick Levin*

Spring Awakening runs through May 10 at the UO University Theatre; \$14 students, staff, seniors, \$16 general.

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THE MADNESS OF MEMORY LANE

VLT director Gerald Walters discusses the
challenges of *The Other Place*

The human memory is a most wily creature, a Picasso-like construction of images and emotions. And if we manipulate our own memories, to what extent is anything we remember real?

Part psychological study, part fast-paced thriller, *The Other Place* is a play that explores the fascinating study of memory. According to *The New York Times*, the play is "cunningly constructed entertainment that discloses its nifty twists at intervals that keep us intrigued."

To learn about the process of producing this juicy new play, I contacted the play's director, Gerald Walters. For Walters, it's the mystery of the play that first drew him in. "I kept wondering," he says, "was one of the characters fabricating her past and present in her mind or was she ill and not thinking clearly? It was a mystery to me, what was real and what was made up."

The Other Place has been called a "contemporary psychological

thriller," and so I asked Walters how he manages to balance the intellectual aspects of the play with the pacing necessary for a thriller. "I believe you have to treat the play as if it was a thriller, which means the intellectual aspects of the play have to be treated as the facts that are always presented in a thriller," he says. "That in turn means the pace of the play has to move at a steady to sometimes a breathtaking pace to keep the audience interest from beginning to end, and their ultimate resolution to the ending."

Sound like a bit of a workout for an actor? It is. "The actors have to ride the emotional roller coaster with the audience as the author unfolds his story in his play," Walters notes.

The preview performance on May 1 will aptly benefit the Alzheimer's Association. Walters says that *The Other Place* can help us to better understand and work with those suffering from Alzheimer's. "I feel this play allows the viewer to see one of the ways to cope with the people suffering from this type of behavior, dementia or Alzheimer's," he says.

Walters hopes the audience keeps an open mind "no matter what information is given to them by the characters." Expect to be surprised by how your perception will shift throughout the show. "I can almost guarantee that after the show ends, there will be a different opinion between the audience members of what actually happened," he warns.

Prepare for a bumpy ride down memory lane. — *Anna Grace*

The Other Place runs May 2 through May 11 at The Very Little Theatre in Stage Left; \$10.