

MUSIC TODAY, MUSIC TOMORROW

From the contemporary Music Today Festival to a John Williams' score

Of all the music events happening in Eugene this month, perhaps none is more valuable than the University of Oregon's **Music Today Festival**. In contrast to most classical music institutions, which over the past century have turned into moldering antiquities, endlessly recycling well-known works by long dead Europeans, the Music Today Festival is devoted to incubating the creative work of Oregon's next generation of composers.

Created by UO music professor Robert Kyr, the festival, which runs Monday, Jan. 19, through Jan. 31 at various locations in the UO's Beall Hall, involves more than 100 student composers and performers, includes 40 world premieres during six concerts (counting one in Portland) and stars one of today's most inspirational young classical musicians. A member of Boston's Grammy-winning Roomful of Teeth, soprano **Esteli Gomez** has in several residencies at the UO showed young musicians how to forge a creative life in the living tradition of classical music, helping composers connect their innovative ideas with audiences' need for musical beauty and freshness.

Gomez's Jan. 19 concert features premieres by eight emerging UO composers. Another star in the new music firmament, UO faculty member **Molly Barth** spearheads

a Jan. 25 concert of flute music by a half dozen UO composers. On Jan. 28, **Tai Hei Ensemble**, one of the school's many student-run groups dedicated to new music, plays improvised music by UO composers and others from around the world. The next night, **sonos domum Ensemble** explores new sonic structures, some improvised in collaboration with performers and audience members. Both concerts are free, as is the Jan. 31 **Oregon Composers Forum Chamber Orchestra** concert featuring new music for larger performing forces.



BRANFORD MARSALIS

Speaking of contemporary sounds, the **Eugene Symphony's** excellent Jan. 22 concert at the Hult Center features mostly 20th-century music drawn from staged sources, including a work by the dean of film composers, John Williams, whose "Escapades for Alto Saxophone" comes from his score to Steven Spielberg's 2002 caper *Catch Me if You Can*. The soloist in both that piece and French composer Jacques Ibert's breezy 1935 "Chamber Concertino for Alto Saxophone" is none other than jazz great **Branford Marsalis**, who's worked often with classical orchestras and will also be working with young musicians while he's here — another investment in music's future.

The dreamy 2007 piece "Isabelle Eberhardt Dreams of Pianos" by another acclaimed young American composer, Brooklyn's Missy Mazzoli, has been performed so often (three times in the past few months in Oregon alone) that it's becoming a modern standard, and you can hear it at the terrific pianist **Shai Vosner's** Jan. 25 Chamber Music@Beall Hall recital. Mazzoli's piano-and-tape piece preceded her later opera about the short-lived, early 20th-century Swiss adventuress and feminist idol. Vosner will also play some lovely impromptus and a great sonata by Schubert, whose music actually floats through Mazzoli's drifting composition. At Beall on Jan. 20, pianist **Jon Jang** plays original music that combines jazz, classical and traditional Chinese folk music forms, while the next day, another well-regarded young pianist, **Sang Woo Kang**, plays classics.

Finally, for some *really* old proto-feminism, on Thursday, Jan. 15, at the UO's Lawrence Hall, you can hear storyteller **Dolores Hydock** recount a medieval courtly romance (with cross dressing!) in which a young girl raised as a boy becomes a knight and faces betrayal, all accompanied by music of the period on ancient instruments like lute, viol, harp and hurdy-gurdy. ■

THEATER BY ANNA GRACE

LIFE AFTER FAITH

*Oregon Contemporary Theatre offers
A Bright New Boise*

Ah, yes — when God finally arrives in all his glory to destroy the wicked and raise up the true believers in a dazzling city of eternal happiness, how beautiful it all will be! Right? Right?

That is the tough question posed in Samuel D. Hunter's *A Bright New Boise*, now at Oregon Contemporary Theatre. The play focuses on Will (Russell Dyball), a man who has given his life to a non-denominational church, stalwartly keeping its books and spreading the faith to the neglect of all things worldly. Apparently, if the end is at hand, it doesn't really matter that you have lost your family, are essentially homeless and holding down a poverty-wage job.

When the church falls apart in scandal and disgrace, Will seeks to put together a life on imperfect Earth while desperately hanging on to his hopes for an end to this world of sorrow. "There are greater things than life," he nearly pleads. "There have to be." Because, if there's nothing but this life, Will has failed in every possible way.

And if all that weren't trouble enough, he's wearing a bright blue vest and a nametag, working part-time at a craft store.

In *A Bright New Boise*, playwright Hunter contrasts the mundane with dreams of the divine, creating a dark comedy that keeps you laughing until at last you're chilled to the core. The fact that all of Will's deep revelations are unfolding in the break room of a Hobby Lobby craft store amid the drama of retail couldn't be more appropriate. With a zealous store manager and a nearly continuous Hobby Lobby TV station illuminating the benefits of pipe



KARI WELCH AND RUSSELL DYBALL
IN *A BRIGHT NEW BOISE*

cleaners, it's the perfect modern setting for an existential crisis.

Director Tara Wilbrew turns out a sharp production. With a script that is very funny, all the while relentlessly drawing the audience into disheartening reality, Wilbrew smoothly manages the evolving tone of the play. She tolerates no weak links. Every actor is spot-on. The set and production elements wrap the play solidly, tightening our suspension of disbelief.

Dyball is fascinating as Will. His deep, honest portrayal allows us to sympathize with a character we may not be altogether familiar with. His work opposite Zach Twardowski (the unstable, manipulative Alex) is worth

studying for those interested in acting.

Steven Coatsworth and Kari Welch offer clever turns as a pair of Will's co-workers. As Pauline, the energetic, overburdened store manager, Ruth Mandsagar utilizes shades of Jane Lynch à la *Glee*.

The play's conclusion echoes Will's messianic desires; ultimately, there are no answers. The hope of connection between a father and son, the choice to live in fantasy or reality, the sacred need to connect with others, the drive to create meaning in a chaotic world — it all clashes in a tangle of life, with no end in sight. ■

A Bright New Boise runs through Jan. 31 at Oregon Contemporary Theatre; \$15-\$30, tickets at 465-1506 or oetheatre.org.