



## GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Oregon Shakespeare Festival opens 81st season with beloved classics and world premieres

As the tilted Earth spins and progresses through her orbit, late February brings light and warmth flooding back to us. But spring is not the only fresh thing bubbling up from all points the south. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland soon greets the lengthening days, buzzing with new stories that are beautifully staged.

Under the artistic direction of Bill Rauch, the internationally renowned festival's 81st season boasts first-run plays, elegant classics and a commitment to bringing a broader world perspective to the stage.

Shakespeare first: OSF is in the second year of an aggressive cycle to produce each of the Bard's 37 plays over a period of 10 years. OSF has completed the cannon

a few times since 1935, each previous cycle taking about two decades. This explains why we'll be treated to a lush *Timon of Athens* later in the season.

In addition, to celebrate the 400th year anniversary of William Shakespeare's death (has it really been 400 years already?), the company offers five of Shakespeare's plays hitting all four of his major genres: comedy, tragedy, romance and history.

Beyond the Bard of Avon, Ashland's festival has a number of other delights. If your bent runs towards new theater, the company is staging four world premiers this time around. *The River Bride*, written by Marisela Trevino Orta and directed for OSF by Laurie Woolery, is a modern-day tale of love and transformation based on Amazon

folklore. It is part of the festival's ongoing commitment to telling stories that reflect the broader global culture.

*Roe*, written by Lisa Loomer and directed by Bill Rauch, is the next installment of the festival's American Revolutions series. American Revolutions attempts to mirror the scope and scale of Shakespeare's work by commissioning up to 37 new works reflecting major moments of change in the history of the United States. *Roe* chronicles the divergent paths of lawyer and plaintiff in the years after their landmark case of *Roe vs. Wade*.

Two fresh adaptations will hit the boards as well. Penny Metropulos and Linda Alper have created a new script for *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens' complex, moving story of love, revenge and the nature of generosity. Also up is a much-anticipated country-western take on *The Yeoman of the Guard* written by Sean Graney, Andra Velis Simon and Matt Kahler. This 80-minute, family friendly, audience-interactive adaptation of Gilbert and Sullivan's goofy, pun-filled operetta gives a touch of twang to unrequited love and wrongfully condemned men.

Currently, OSF is open with four stories: *The River Bride*, *Great Expectations*, *The Yeoman of the Guard* and *Twelfth Night*. The last is a beautiful, bittersweet comedy of reinventing one's self in the wake of tragedy. Director Christopher Liam Moore sets his *Twelfth Night* in 1930s Hollywood with a crooning soundtrack.

OSF's season of 11 plays will continue to roll out over the next six months. Opening in the spring are *Roe* and *Vietgone*, a comedy about Vietnamese immigrants on a zany road trip through America in the last days of the Vietnam War. The outdoor Elizabethan theater beckons in June with *Hamlet*, *The Wiz* and *The Winter's Tale*. *Richard II* and *Timon of Athens* finish up the season, opening in July.

For more information, including dates, times, locations and ticket prices, visit [osfashland.org](http://osfashland.org). — Anna Grace

## GROWING UP GAY

Local actor Brian Haimbach discusses his play *How to Be a Sissy*

**H**ow to Be a Sissy, a new solo work by actor-writer Brian Haimbach, opens with the memory of a little boy wearing a towel on his head and imagining that he has long, glorious hair.

"I always played with dolls, as early as I can remember," says Haimbach, who directs the theatre program at Lane Community College. "I don't remember when I started putting the towel on my head — maybe about third grade." As a boy, Haimbach's mother made him keep his hair closely cropped.

He recalls a neighbor and best friend at the time, a girl with "long, straight, thick blond hair ... I remember how beautiful her hair was," he says.

Lacking his own tresses, Haimbach took charge of his sister's coiffure. "I'd brush it, braid it," he recalls. "It got to the point that my stepfather started to see a problem. He wanted to send me in for counseling. He was pretty crazy."

Haimbach came out as gay his senior year in high school, "which is pretty late, by today's standards," he says.

"As a kid, what disturbed me the most was being called a 'fag,' when I didn't think I was one. I wasn't fully understanding what that was, and I was not yet attracted to boys."

Flash-forward to college, and Haimbach had the opportunity to work with Elizabeth Whitney, a queer solo performance artist and writer.

"She and I dated for a little bit," he says of his relationship with Whitney. "We've had oddly similar paths, and now we're both in long-term relationships with people of the same gender," Haimbach adds.

"She [Whitney] has many shows. She takes her personal life and makes it theatrical."

Haimbach credits Whitney with this takeaway: "Personal stories can be moving, and the more specific the moments, the wider your audience."

It might seem incongruous, but that's storytelling: finding the details, the little pieces of connection that might resonate for an audience.

"You're really opening the doors, making yourself available to them," Haimbach says. "Telling stories of pain, discovery, personal journeys — everybody's gone through those, no matter how different they may be."

Haimbach workshoped *How to Be a Sissy*, his first full-length piece, with Whitney. He says he benefited from her eye, and her heart. "She was a cheerleader," he says. "In any writing process, there's a point where you're like, 'This is shit. What am I doing?' and she helped me get through it."

One of the highlights of the show, Haimbach says, are the frequent visits from his alter-ego persona, known as Percy Q Shun.

"Percy comes out and teaches a lesson based on something autobiographical, like how to do hair or how to dance or how to dress fabulous," Haimbach says. "Percy doesn't care if anyone likes him or not. He can say whatever the fuck he wants."

Haimbach says he's enjoyed building a character he wishes he'd grown up with. "What if there had been a *Sesame Street* for little queer kids who like to play with dolls?" he asks.

*How to Be a Sissy* plays at 6:30 pm and 8:30 pm Saturday, Feb. 27, at The Wayward Lamb, 150 W. Broadway; 21 and over; \$5, tickets available via The Wayward Lamb's Facebook page or at the door. Proceeds to benefit LCC Theatre Scholarships. — Rachael Carnes

