

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY AT THE BEACH

OCT premieres *Shrimp & Gritts: She's Gone*, a new work from Eugene playwright Paul Calandrino

Living in Oregon's Willamette Valley means that Manifest Destiny, also known as the Pacific Ocean, is never more than an hour away. From this distance, or even up close, it's easy to romanticize such a beautiful place. Gazing upon the Pacific, anything feels possible.

Visit the Oregon Coast, however, and sometimes you find sandblasted people and communities, stooped low against literal and metaphorical headwinds — economically and emotionally depressed.

It's this side of the Oregon coastal experience Eugene playwright Paul Calandrino explores in his excellent new work *Shrimp & Gritts: She's Gone*, now in production at Oregon Contemporary Theatre under the direction of Brian Haimbach.

The play, set in a tiny fictional town on the coast, is the story of a love triangle missing its apex. A never-seen character named Serena has left her boyfriend Gritts, a salty old mariner played by Bary Shaw (*Stupid F@#*ing Bird*). Gritts is despondent: drinking, thinking and talking hard to and with his friend Shrimp, a resilient reed of a woman played by Rebecca Nachison (*August: Osage County*).

Shrimp has her own secrets and feelings surrounding Serena's sudden departure, and through endless talk and



BARY SHAW AND REBECCA NACHISON IN SHRIMP & GRITTS: SHE'S GONE

even more drinking, truths are told and betrayals are exposed between the old friends. A rift develops.

The leads are both excellent. Shaw's sonorous, weary and pondering baritone makes music with Calandrino's insightful, topical and often quite funny rhythmic dialogue. As Shrimp, Nachison has a little more to do. Her revelations and confessions drive the story, and her attempt to quit drinking leads to a funny scene about binging on junk food.

Intercutting the scenes between Shrimp and Gritts are musical interludes from the duo Clementine and Ruud, played by Tara Wibrew (*A Bright New Boise*) and Cloud Pemble (*Silent Sky*). Clementine and Ruud are sweetly sad romantic partners and professional musicians touring Oregon Coast D-level markets (in this case a fictional inn called The Sandraker; you can almost imagine the disappointing clam chowder, presented on the menu to be the "World's Best").

At one point Ruud mentions just getting to town from a gig in the Bay Area. Red Bluff is not the Bay Area, Clementine retorts, rolling her eyes. In between songs, the duo squabble as lovers, showing just how hard it can be to truly know anyone, even those whom we supposedly love.

In his director's notes, Haimbach, relatively new to Eugene, speaks of getting to know his adopted home and how Calandrino's characters are also learning to "accept and appreciate their new life circumstances." Despite still feeling new to Oregon, Haimbach, with Calandrino's language, has nailed the feel of the Oregon Coast: You can hear the seagulls, smell the briny water, feel the sand in your sandals and recognize the notes of living in a beautiful place full of so many niggling disappointments.

Shrimp & Gritts: She's Gone runs now through Aug. 20 at Oregon Contemporary Theatre; \$15-\$28, tickets at octrtheatre.org or 541-465-1506.

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