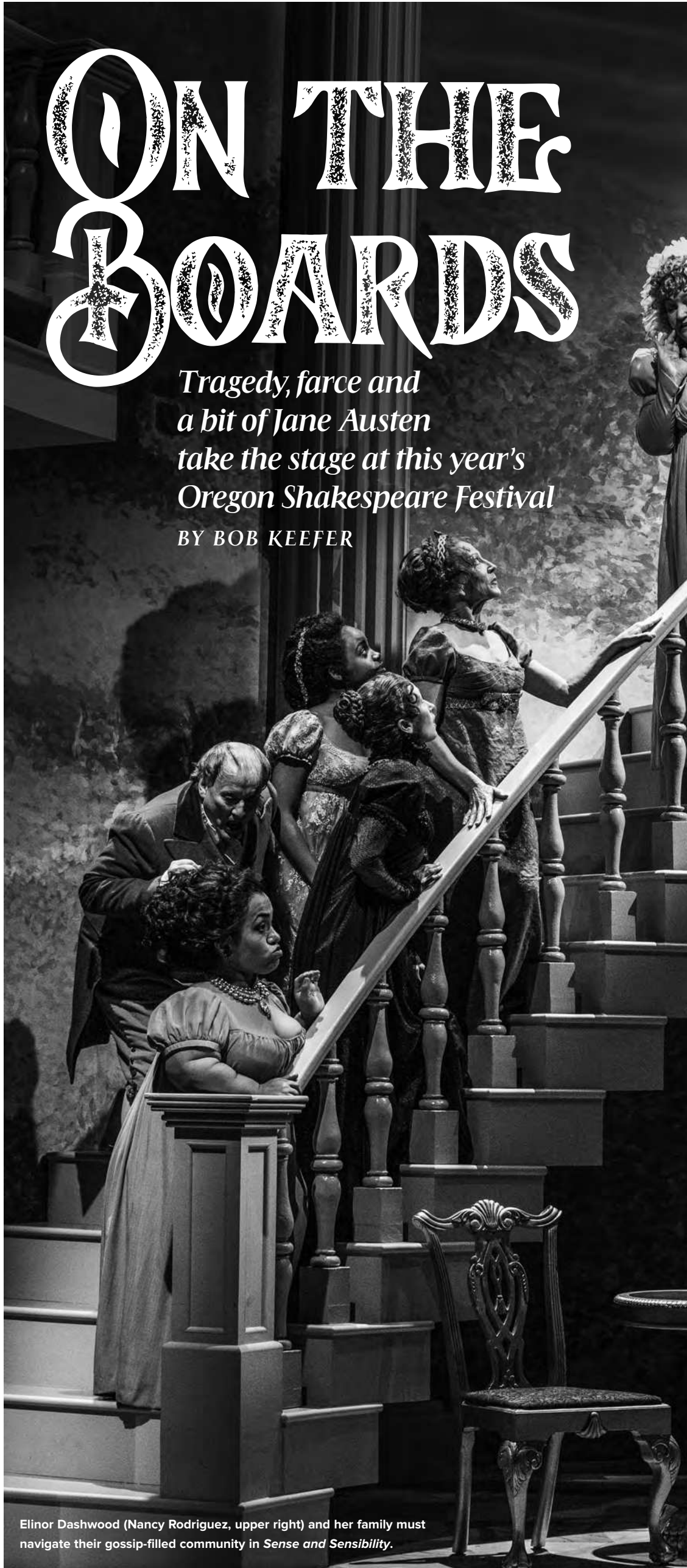


ON THE BOARDS

Tragedy, farce and a bit of Jane Austen take the stage at this year's Oregon Shakespeare Festival

BY BOB KEEFER



Elinor Dashwood (Nancy Rodriguez, upper right) and her family must navigate their gossip-filled community in *Sense and Sensibility*.

The

he buzz in Ashland last weekend at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's season openings should, by all rights, have been about Bill Rauch.

The popular and influential artistic director of the 83-year-old festival announced in February that he was leaving in 2019 to take over the still-unbuilt Ronald O. Perelman Performing Arts Center, which is to be built at Ground Zero in New York City.

That's an amazing honor — and a loss — for OSF, over which Rauch has exerted a profound influence since he started there 12 years ago.

But by the time thousands of theater lovers had assembled in Ashland for the weekend's shows, the startling news had been absorbed, chewed over and discounted to the point that when I found myself sitting at the next table over from Rauch for lunch on Saturday at the Ashland Springs Hotel, there was little to say or ask besides "Congratulations" and "We'll miss you."

The real buzz over the weekend, as it turned out, was about a play — Karen Zacarias' *Destiny of Desire*, which made its West Coast premiere Sunday afternoon, Feb. 26, in OSF's Angus Bowmer Theatre. Everyone from avid theater-goers to the staff at restaurants were talking about it.

Destiny is clearly the one to see this season — the show everyone will be talking about, the one you'd better buy your tickets for early because, by all rights, it's going to sell out soon.

I'll get back to *Destiny* in a moment. But first let's look at the rest of opening weekend, starting with the show that kicked off the season Friday night, Feb. 23.