



GOD HELP THE OUTCASTS

A Disney twist on Victor Hugo's gothic tragedy in ACE's The Hunchback of Notre Dame

This past weekend I had the pleasure of bringing my 8-year-old thespian to Actors Cabaret of Eugene to see *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. For some reason, my memory of Victor Hugo's dark, albeit lyrically striking gothic novel had been replaced by images of adorably animated gargoyles, and so I did not expect the abundant flow of tears that inevitably fell from beneath my child's messy bangs.

ACE's production of *Hunchback* is an emotional one, complete with all of mankind's human frailties: lust, envy, murder ... you get the sinful picture. That's not to say, however, that the play was all doom and gloom.

From the lighting to the incredibly talented vocal cast, director Joe Zingo transforms a quaint dinner theater in the heart of downtown Eugene into a melodious cathedral overlooking the seedy streets of Paris. The story centers on Quasimodo (Anthony Krall), the half-formed man tucked away in the bell tower by his twisted uncle Frollo (Tom Grimsley), and Esmeralda (Ashley Apelzin), the gypsy woman he falls in lust (or love) with.

Grimsley is a formidable Frollo, who is "a jerk," according to my dinner date. While the entire cast spends a good part of the play flexing its vocal range, it's Krall who is especially moving in his performance of the unusually misshapen protagonist.

The score, created by Disney's golden composer, Alan Menken, is really quite powerful in how it infuses tragedy with a quiet hope that things could possibly be different for Quasimodo and the poor souls around him — but don't hold your breath. The chorus of more than a dozen hooded statues is profoundly present for nearly the entire play, serenading the audience with a kind of harmonious moral compass.

The more-colorful elements of the play come from a rowdy band of Gypsies, a troupe that might have been drawn right from the Oregon Country Fair. While they certainly played their part with the expected rainbow of boom and sass, the Gypsies often drowned out their heroic female lead. Thus, Apelzin's lovely voice was heard only during solos.

To be honest, I thought the play was going to feel antiquated or at least weirdly miscalculated, which sometimes happens when Disney puts its fluff on dismay. However, Zingo and his cast manage to create a thoughtful culmination of beauty and despair.

Ultimately, *Hunchback* asks us to consider the implications of hypocrisy and pride, and what it might mean if we all lived courageously, with kindness toward one another. Of course these are prevalent issues at the very core of our being, going back to a time even before the cathedrals were constructed.

And while kindness may not prevail in *Hunchback*, we are at least reminded that, at the end of the night, when we finally kiss the tear-stained cheeks of our children, we all have the power within ourselves to be truly courageous. — *Alexis DeFiglia*

The Hunchback of Notre Dame plays through June 2 at Actors Cabaret of Eugene; tickets and times at 541-683-4368 or actorscabaret.org.

BACK DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

Ballet Fantastique and crew refashion Alice in Wonderland

In Lewis Carroll's 1865 novel, Alice falls from the quaint English countryside into a whirling subconsciousness thick with verse and whimsy, but in the new Ballet Fantastique adaptation, Wonderland gets remixed for the stage.

Alice in Wonderland, a new collaborative work from choreographer-producers Donna and Hannah Bontrager, shirks any expectation of traditional ballet by introducing Eugene's own High Step Society to the Hult Center orchestra pit. High Step's electro-swing spins vintage jazz through the laundry cycle of electronic dance music, and it comes out fresh, clean and surreal, a proper house-band for March hares, hookah-smoking caterpillars and Cheshire cats.

Hannah Bontrager plays Alice, the intrepid adventurer, as she navigates the court of the Queen of Hearts, a crazy croquet game, a lobster quadrille and the Mad Hatter's tea party through a balletic series of movements that incorporate social dances and circus acrobatics.

This kaleidoscopic iteration of Wonderland includes a steampunked ensemble of more than 50 cast members. The project also represents a collaboration with a formidable team of female artists including international designer Allison Ditson, headpiece designer Mitra Chester, set painters Kelle DeForrest and Katey Finley, and Ballet Fantastique's librettist-historian team of Genevieve and Deborah Speer.

So don't be late for the very important date: Mother's Day.

Alice in Wonderland plays 7:30 pm Friday and Saturday, and 2:30 pm Sunday, May 11-13, at the Hult's Soreng Theater; tickets \$28-58 (students/youth \$18-43), with \$5 off regularly priced tickets for groups of five or more. — *Patrick Newson*

