

WEST BANK BLUES

Eugene playwright explores the thorny politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in *Checkpoint*

Martin Cohen's intense new drama *Checkpoint*, which opened Feb. 1 at the Wildish Community Theater in Springfield, meticulously dissects both sides of the conflict that has wracked Israel and Palestine for half a century.

Told through the eyes of two families, one on each side of the West Bank divide, *Checkpoint* deftly sketches the unsolvable paradox that results when two closely related peoples violently maintain a religious and historical claim to the same land.

Robert Hirsh directs a cast that includes some of Eugene's best performers, including Bary Shaw, who plays Peretz, an Israeli government official and Orthodox Jew who has lost two sons in the conflict, and Denise LaCroix as Hinda, his wife.



Perhaps the most interesting character is Peretz' eldest son, Avi (Tony Stirpe), a soldier in the Israeli Defense Forces who has just gotten out of jail after a crisis of conscience led him to refuse army orders.

Hirsh himself does a fine turn as Hassan-Al-Ahmad, an imam and political go-between who arranges the critical meeting that serves as the story's climax.

The play is performed on a minimalist set — designed by Hirsh — and the story itself is similarly stripped down to core political issues.

While that keeps the action moving, it also means that *Checkpoint* — a semi-finalist in the 2017 Ashland New Play Festival — suffers from its own intensity. None of the characters seems to have a life outside politics and conflict, and too much of the play's dialogue sounds like a sharp op-ed being read out loud. ■

Martin Cohen's Checkpoint continues through Feb. 17 at the Wildish Community Theater in Springfield. Tickets are \$19, \$17 students, at WildishTheater.com.

ELECTRA SPEAKS

Lane brings back a bigger, better version of *Oresteia*

If you missed Lane Community College's rock opera *Oresteia* in 2015, take heart. It's back — as *Electra's Oresteia* — and bigger and better than before, says LCC's director of theater Brian Haimbach.

"The music [by local wunderkind Cullen Vance] is the same, but 75 percent of the lyrics and all of the book is rewritten. It's a completely different play," Haimbach says.

With Haimbach at the helm, LCC has been focused on collaborative engagement. And their Student Production Association (SPA) calls most of the shots, from choosing what shows to produce and how to fund them, to even getting elbows-in on a 2,000-year-old primary text.

So how do you tackle fifth-century B.C. Greek tragedy?

"Aaron Smart, former SPA president, is a really good playwright," Haimbach says.



PHOTO BY DUSTIN NAGY

Smart, along with current LCC student Malakhai Schnell, Cullen Vance and Haimbach, each took a crack at the book rewrite. "But Aaron edited it for voice," Haimbach says.

The Oresteia takes us to Agamemnon's return from the Trojan War and the tragedies that ensue, resulting in societal change.

"In our original show, we see a society moving from vengeance to justice," Haimbach says. "But in this new version, we move from trusting our leaders to make our decisions for us, to making our own decisions."

And the protagonist in this new version is a woman.

Classic tragedy writers such as Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus have defined Elektra, the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. She's pretty famous. Sophocles depicts her as a loyal, devoted daughter — a daddy's girl. Euripides shows her more resentful, ticked to be married to a peasant. And Aeschylus?

"This new version has a moral center in Elektra," Haimbach says. "Before, she was sidelined. But in this new version, Elektra speaks."

LCC's production of *Electra's Oresteia* is slated to coincide with the regional Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival hosted by the University of Oregon. ■

Performances are 7:30 pm Thursday through Sunday, Feb. 14-17, and 2 pm Sunday, Feb. 17, in Ragazzino Performance Hall, LCC main campus, 4000 E. 30th Ave; tickets are free and available at the door.

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