

SCRATCHPAD

Present laughter at 'Blithe Spirit'

By ERICK BENDEL
COAST WEEKEND

Good comedy is famously known as a high-wire act. Timing, tone — everything must be finely calibrated for a show to be funny, for it to actually work as comedy.

On Saturday, a friend and I caught "Blithe Spirit," now running at Cannon Beach's Coaster Theatre. Noel Coward's 1941 romantic comedy tells the story of Charles,

a married man who invites a medium to perform a séance at his home as part of research for his book — and the medium ends up conjuring the ghost of Charles' dead wife. It's a play driven by witty, screwball dialogue that flies so fast it's almost impossible to catch every joke.

I asked the actors if it's a challenge to keep a straight face while people are laughing through their characters' rapid-fire repartee.

"Only if something goes wrong," said Ellen Jensen, who plays the dead wife's spirit. That is, only if something breaks the rhythm or reality of the performance.

David Sweeney, who plays Charles, said that, over time, the actors get to know where the likely laughs are, and it becomes easier to anticipate them without giving away that they're anticipating them.

"The first couple times you have an audience, you

don't know exactly what they're going to respond to, and then after a while it becomes fairly clear what are the sort of usual triggers of laughs," he said. "And sometimes they're things you don't expect."

The challenge for Sweeney, he said, is "always to let the audience decide, and not try to telegraph, 'I want you to laugh now.'"

Every night is different, because every audience is different.


Karen Martin, who plays the medium, said actors tend to give better performances, not when they have the silence to concentrate, but when the audience is laughing at things meant to be funny.

"If they're really quiet, that's harder, because we need the feedback to build the energy," she said.

It helps when at least one audience member starts laughing early on, because the rest of the audience then

feels it has permission to laugh, too. "A lot of people are very shy about laughing out loud," she said.

What the actors hope for is a joyous feedback loop: The actors drawing laughter from the audience, the laughter feeding the actors' performances. So, if it's a comedy, Martin said, "Laugh! Out loud!"

On the night I saw "Blithe Spirit," theatergoers — including me and my friend — did laugh out loud, and often. 

coast weekend

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

arts & entertainment

ON THE COVER



Actors rehearse a scene from 'The Birds' at the Astor Street Opry Company.

BOTTOM PHOTO BY COLIN MURPHY

See story on Page 10

COAST WEEKEND EDITOR
ERICK BENDEL

CALENDAR COORDINATOR
REBECCA HERREN

CONTRIBUTORS

PATTY HARDIN
RYAN HUME
BARBARA LLOYD McMICHAEL
PATRICK WEBB

To advertise in Coast Weekend, call 503-325-3211 or contact your local sales representative.
© 2017 COAST WEEKEND

New items for publication consideration must be submitted by 10 a.m. Tuesday, one week and two days before publication.

TO SUBMIT AN ITEM

Phone: 503.325.3211 Ext. 217
or 800.781.3211

Fax: 503.325.6573

E-mail: editor@coastweekend.com

Address: P.O. Box 210 •
949 Exchange St. Astoria,
OR 97103

4 THE ARTS
Music with sax appeal
The Dukes of Swing play in Chinook

10 FEATURE
Rattling cages
Astor Street Opry Company stages 'The Birds'

14 DINING
Mouth of the Columbia
Bye Bye, Blackbird

FURTHER ENJOYMENT

MUSIC CALENDAR.....5
SEE + DO 12, 13
CROSSWORD 20
CW MARKETPLACE 18
GRAB BAG 23



Find it all online!

CoastWeekend.com features full calendar listings, keyword search and easy sharing on social media.

Coast Weekend is published every Thursday by the EO Media Group, all rights reserved. No part of this publication can be reproduced without consent of the publisher. Coast Weekend appears weekly in The Daily Astorian and the Chinook Observer.

SIMPLY BEAUTIFUL



Custom Design
Fine Jewelry
Engagement
Diamonds & Rings

*Jewelry is very personal...
...it tells your story.*

12 Month Free
Financing Available

1150 Commercial St.
503-325-8029
www.hollymchone.com

We buy your old or worn out jewelry,
or trade it in for something new!

MASTER  JEWELER
BRILLIANCE YOU DESERVE®

Holly McHone
JEWELERS