

# Rhythms of Cultures



PHOTO BY JENNY GRAHAM/OREGON SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

Reina Guthrie and Donna Simone Johnson give a comic book edge to 'Revenge Song: A Vampire Cowboys Creation,' one of five new productions now playing at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland.

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"Revenge Song: A Vampire Cowboys Creation" may be encountering a bit of rough water in finding its audience. Set on the venerated outdoor stage, the Allen Elizabethan Theatre, it is about as far from traditional as anything OSF has staged, which is exactly its object. It is the work of Qui Nguyen (who wrote "Vietgone," which charmed OSF audiences in 2016), Robert Ross Parker (who directed and wrote the lyrics with Nguyen), and Shane Rettig (who wrote the music). All are collaborators in Vampire Cowboys, a self-styled geek theater company whose aesthetic has been to create and produce new work based in action/adventure and dark comedy with a comic book edge.

This musical fits within that aesthetic. It takes the story of Julie d'Aubigny--an actual woman from 17th-century France who transgressed gender boundaries, had affairs with both men and women, was a practiced sword fighter and famous opera singer, and broke rules of all kinds--and turns it into a raunchy, action and comic-book-humor fest. Most of the story here is based on what is actually said to be true about d'Aubigny, but the language and aesthetic is more openly profane and current than a traditional period drama would be, the better to capture and celebrate how shocking d'Aubigny was in her day.

OSF's typical audiences aren't necessarily prepared for this level of irreverence, judging from some of the reaction the show has gotten. But it will delight those who can relax and receive the show on its own terms; it's not making a case for anything but rather aims to be playful in the way a lot of comic-book art aims to be--wild, violent, profane, and pushing boundaries for the sake of doing so. The cast and crew are all the way in, and audiences willing to go with them will enjoy the ride. "Revenge Song" plays on the Allen Elizabethan stage through Oct. 14.

"Unseen" is the work of playwright Mona Mansour, and is enjoying its West Coast premiere under the direction of Evrin Odcikin. It's an intimate drama

about global concerns, centered on an American conflict photographer, Mia; her Turkish former lover, Derya; and her mother, Jane, who travels to Derya's Istanbul apartment after Mia is found unconscious but otherwise unharmed at the site of a massacre in Syria where she'd been shooting photographs. In the play, Mia serves as an exemplar of the conflicted morality of the citizens of Western superpowers; Mia makes her living from documenting the pain of others in war zones whose suffering is often either inflamed or neglected by those very powers.

Is Mia doing good or an exploiter herself? Both? How is she impacted by the suffering she witnesses? How is she implicated? These questions animate the story, though I can't say their resolution is wholly satisfying. In some ways, Derya (Nora el Samahy) would have been the more interesting focus, though a riskier subject for attracting American audiences. What attracts Derya to Mia (Helen Sadler), and what sort of relationship is possible with an apparently talented but in many ways insufferable American? We otherwise learn little about Derya's story, since in the play she exists mainly in relationship to Mia. Meanwhile, Mia's suffering feels mostly self-inflicted; the occasional cluelessness of her privileged mother (Caroline Shaffer) feels more honest, even while Mia would be viewed as more worldly.

The performances are solid, and the design artists bring us into Mia's view of Istanbul and Syria via music and art and movement; yet the play offers only snippets of the worlds of Mia's subjects and of Derya. Perhaps the best way to approach this play is to allow Mia to function as a mirror to ourselves as Americans; what is dissatisfying about her ought to dissatisfy us about ourselves. "Unseen" plays in the intimate Thomas Theater through July 31.

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# SPORTS

## Blazers Select Sharpe with No. 7 Pick



Shaedon Sharpe (right) shakes hands with NBA Commissioner Adam Silver after being selected seventh overall by the Portland Trail Blazers in the NBA basketball draft, Thursday, June 23, in New York. (AP photo)

## Five-star recruit never suited up in college

(AP) — The Portland Trail Blazers selected Shaedon Sharpe with the seventh pick in the NBA draft on June 23, taking a chance on a player who never suited up in college.

Sharpe, 6-foot-6 wing from Canada, was a five-star recruit who committed to Kentucky but never played for the Wildcats. He intended on redshirting his first season, but instead decided to declare for the draft.

"Going from high school to college and not playing your college season and then straight to the NBA," Sharpe said. "It's quite the journey but every step of the way I've just fought and had fun with it."

Coming off a season marked by a spate of injuries, a new coach, a front-office shakeup and a roster overhaul, the Blazers are rebuilding around All-Star Damian Lillard.

"He's a great guard himself and he's been in this league for some time now, so I just can't wait to really learn from him," Sharpe said.

There was talk that Portland might trade the pick.

"I had just worked the phones so diligently, from post-combine on, just tons of trade discussions, tons of pick-swap ideas, or swap plus a player ideas, or pick for a player outright ideas, while continually evaluating the draft," Blazers general manager Joe Cronin said. "As the process went on, we became more and more enamored with pick seven. Most of my trade discussions became, 'You have to wow us to even think about moving this pick.'"

Cronin said he believes Sharpe could

play right away, but time will tell.

"It was a unique situation with Shaedon, where he didn't play college basketball so he wasn't seen or evaluated nearly as much as these other guys," Cronin said. "But we were lucky enough that we had a pretty good foundation on him."

Portland was active ahead of the draft, acquiring Jerami Grant from the Detroit Pistons on Wednesday, according to a person with knowledge of the situation. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because neither team announced the agreement.

Lillard, who was injured for much of last season, played with Grant on the gold medal-winning U.S. team at last year's Tokyo Olympics. Grant averaged 19.2 points in 47 games last season with the Pistons.

Detroit received the 46th pick from in the draft as part of the trade and selected Ismael Kamagate of France. But Kamagate was headed to Denver via another deal.

Portland capped the night by selecting forward Jabari Walker out of Colorado with the 57th pick. Last year as a sophomore, Walker averaged 14.6 points and a Pac-12 leading 9.4 rebounds per game for the Buffaloes. He led the conference with 17 double-doubles.

Walker's father is Samaki Walker, who was the ninth overall pick in the 1996 draft and played 10 seasons in the NBA.

"He's a player that's really intriguing to us because of his mix of youth, size, length, shooting, upside," Cronin said about Walker. "He was two-year guy at Colorado and showed some flashes we thought were really appealing."

The Blazers finished 27-55 last season, their worst record since 2005-06. Clearly eyeing draft position late in the season, Portland lost 11 games by more than 30 points after the All-Star break, and finished in 13th in the Western Conference.