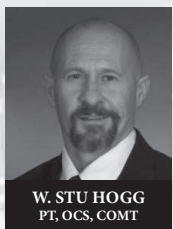


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photo by Jon Stinnett

The cast of 'Jesus Christ Super Star Wars' mugs for a selfie in the skit's penultimate scene. The Opal Theater's 'Monster Mashup' offers six skits that blend the music and plot of two productions.

'Monster Mashup' offers a laugh buffet

BY JON STINNETT
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

Each Halloween season the Opal Theater offers up as its main course an irreverent and unyielding blend of popular films crammed together to hilarious effect. This year, they're serving up a similar menu, buffet style.

Thursday saw the opening of Opal's "Monster Mashup," a collection of six shorter medley plays that stands out as the theater's funniest production yet. Plays like "Nightmare on Sesame Street," "The Wizard of Jaws" and "Saturday Night of the Living Dead Fever" combine the music of one unforgettable of its partner, with a healthy dose of American political absurdity to bring a little levity and a surprising dose of insight to the mix.

Prior to opening, Opal Center

founder Ivan DelSol explained that the group sought to produce a set of shorter plays as opposed to one larger one in the hope that many hands might indeed make light work and lessen the burden on a few key contributors.

"We were wrong; it was way more work," DelSol confided, though the efforts and contributions of so many talented locals gave the play its considerable power, and the fresh perspectives of several writers kept the evening bouncing along and offered humor and wit in unexpected places.

The evening begins with "Jesus Christ Super Star Wars," an adaptation penned by Matt Schaft, who's fast becoming a stalwart of the Opal Theater stage. Madison Long commands attention as the charismatic Jesus Christ Super Skywalker, and the cast nails a few unforgettable tunes before mugging for a selfie.

"Nightmare on Sesame

Street" offers a look at the alternate reality of a Donald Trump presidency through the lens of Alex Ihnat, who's donned the blonde to skewer the candidate himself. This time, Long stands behind and offers the heart and wit of Elmo, one of the evening's standout roles.

The show really hits its stride with "Saturday Night of the Living Dead Fever," as does the performance and chops of its protagonist, Tony Manner, played by Dominic Ihnat. Ihnat joins Lisa Mattiello as Stephanie Mangano and Brendan Lynch to form a clique of zombies that can really move, in the process cementing the younger Ihnat's reputation as one of the theater's most consistent standouts.

With the three-part behemoth of "The Wizard of Jaws," "X-Men of La Mancha" and "Dances with Wolverine," DelSol makes the evening's biggest statement, that of the absurdity of the lack of viable choices

this election season. "There is no shark," the audience hears as one voter after another is unceremoniously gobbled. Here, Elizabeth Peterson shines as Jill Stein, who's too smart to buy the lie and too determined to let it fester. Here's hoping the theater signs on for more of Peterson's stage presence in the future.

As ever, the Opal Theater has also managed to showcase the talents of newcomers with a lot to offer. This time around, Emily Welch is a delight as Leia Magdalene and Jenny Ming Tu nails the reaction to Trump's ascendancy with perfect disgust.

The "Monster Mashup" plays for one more weekend with shows Nov. 3, 4 and 5. More information is available at www.opalcentercg.org. The show is reportedly sold out, though seats often open up at the last minute.

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