

## **Clackamas Repertory Theatre is 'Taking Steps' this season**

*Farce pits several characters at critical points in their lives*

**BY ELLEN SPITALERI**

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“Taking Steps,” the first offering of Clackamas Repertory Theatre’s 2009 season, is a “pretty traditional farce,” said director Slayden Scott Yarbrough.

But, he added, a farce can be “complex and convoluted” and “Taking Steps,” by British playwright Alan Ayckbourn, has the fast-moving pace and all the mistaken identities an audience could want.

The title of the play comes from the fact that all the characters are at a “crucial moment” in their lives and need to take steps to find a new path to freedom, or choose not to, said Yarbrough, who is the producing artistic director of Third Rail Repertory Theatre in Portland, and a multiple-Drammy Award winner.

He said that the central theme of the play involves the fact that the action takes place on all three floors of The Pines, a large house, and yet the stories have all been “condensed onto one plane.”

There is a central spiral staircase and actors “will lap and pass each other; they will be next to someone they can hear but not see,” Yarbrough said.

To make this concept believable is a challenge to the actors, requires that the audience be fully engaged and “adds an element of theatricality” that audiences will find funny, Yarbrough said.

The playwright, he said, “tries to find a new way to play with tradition and the staging of a play. This one is more complex and intricate.”

### **Old money vs. new money**

The basic plot revolves around Leslie, the owner of the house, which is for sale, and a bickering married couple, Elizabeth and Roland, who want to buy it. Leslie, played by Bob Alzman, represents old money, while Elizabeth, played by Amanda Jensen, and Roland, played by Matt Morrison, represent new money.

“I made my fortune in buckets and now I’ve expanded into rubbish bins,” noted Morrison, who added that his character knows he’s not exactly top drawer and is madly trying to overcompensate for it.

Meanwhile Roland has marital woes in that he finds a note from his wife saying she is leaving him, causing him to drink “enormous amounts of scotch.”

Elizabeth is a former dancer who “needs her freedom,” Jensen said, adding that her character is “sarcastic and short with everybody.”

“The costume says a lot” about his character, Alsman said, noting that Leslie wears an eye-popping paisley shirt, a mismatched tie, black leather pants and jacket and a motorcycle helmet.

“He’s a lost soul, looking for some sort of niche. He lives on his credit cards; he is old money” but just doesn’t have much left, and that’s why he’s trying to sell the house, Alsman added.

Yarbrough said he is “extremely fortunate” to be working with the ensemble of actors and the group of supporting technicians that CRT brings to the production.

The actors “have all worked together before; they create a group aesthetic, they are all old pros.”

“It’s been a great thing working with Chris [Whitten],” Yarbrough noted, adding that it was Whitten’s idea to build a central spiral staircase for the set, instead of the traditional two or three staircases that other theatrical groups have used.

As for the costumes, designer Alva Bradford and Yarbrough decided to set the play in the 1970s, using “the complete mishmash of prints that sets the time without doing anything else.”

He added, “I can’t think of stepping into a better situation.”