



On stage

Marion Rossi to star as Willy Loman in 'Death of a Salesman'

By Nancy Raskauskas, The Entertainer | Posted: Thursday, September 24, 2009 7:00 pm

HILLSBORO - "A sabbatical is kind of one of those opportunities to really hone in on what you do as a scholar or artist," said Marion Rossi, a 16-year teaching veteran in the Oregon State University Theater Arts Department, and an actor and director by trade.

Rossi will be taking off fall term to play the lead role of Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's classic American tragedy "Death of A Salesman."

Hillsboro-based Bag&Baggage Productions is opening their new season with the Pulitzer Prize-winning play. When the company's artistic director offered Rossi the role he couldn't turn it down.

"The character of Willy Loman is a touchstone for American actors in the 20th century," Rossi said. "(It's) a large, challenging difficult role."

The play is about 95-100 pages long and Willy Loman is on stage for 85 of those pages, according to Rossi.

Later this fall, Rossi will reprise his role as Scrooge in Bag & Baggage's production of "A Christmas Carol," which was a hit in Corvallis two years ago during a traveling performance at Withycombe Theatre.

Rossi is no stranger to difficult roles. In addition to directing numerous OSU productions, mid-valley audiences will recognize him from recent Willamette Stage Company production's "Heroes" and "A Walk in the Woods."

"Death of a Salesman" will be directed by Scott Palmer, who founded the company in his hometown in 2005. Palmer also directed Oregon State University's annual Bard in the Quad outdoor summer Shakespeare program for its first three seasons.

"That is a great sweeping drama," Palmer said.

For the Bag & Baggage production, Palmer is emphasizing the play less as commentary on broad social values, and more as the story of one family in Brooklyn.

Palmer and Rossi have known each other for 20 years and worked on numerous projects together. Yet this is only the second time Palmer has been the director and Rossi one of his actors.

"Having an actor like Marion perform meant that we could take more risks," Palmer said.

"Scott and I first met at University of Oregon, when he was an undergraduate and I was a graduate," Rossi said. "We have a grudging respect for each other."

"He's a curmudgeon," Palmer laughed. Still it's "a great and very fruitful kind of relationship."

If you were to work with someone that has that much acting experience and directing experience, sometimes you worry that they won't respect your opinion or take directions, Palmer explained. "I've never had that problem with Marion."

Rossi, one of four tenured theater faculty at OSU, is grateful to his department for giving him the opportunity to fully immerse in a play.

"Theater can be all consuming. That's part of the joy of it; it really is, Rossi said. "The time is an incredible luxury. It's real different from my previous outings, when just finding two hours to work on a play was a challenge."

"We're lucky, in part, that our creative work here as well as other places is part of our job descriptions," he said. "I think I've got one of the greatest jobs in the world."