WILLAMETTE UNIVERSITY
FROM THE Quad
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The Campaign Newsletter from the Office of University Relations

Kresge Theatre in Line for Much-Needed Remodel

Not only has *The Taming of the Shrew* been presented in the University's playhouse, but careful examination of Kresge Theatre might cause you to believe that the Bard was actually here to direct it. Alas Petruchio, our beloved playhouse is in disrepair and we seek noble men and women of means to assist us.

Built in 1923 to replace a gymnasium that had been destroyed by fire, the playhouse became the home of the Department of Theatre in 1974 and was remodeled in 1978. As is the case with most 85-year-old structures, the building now needs to be rebuilt from the inside out.

Phase I will involve an overhaul of classrooms, shops, labs and studios — basically everything except the performance space and the technology needed to support it. It also includes seismic upgrades. The estimated cost for Phase I is between $2 million and $3 million. The work has been started, and these repairs should be completed in the fall.

Phase II will bring upgrades to the performance space and the front section of the playhouse, which includes the lobby, department offices and restrooms. The outside of the theatre will also be upgraded with a new entrance on the north side. Estimated to cost $2 million, Phase II will begin in May 2009 and will be completed in September 2009.

While the timelines are designed to take full advantage of the late spring and summer hiatus, theatre students and faculty are fully prepared for disruption and actually welcome the challenge of possibly being tossed.

Being "homeless" demands resourcefulness, flexibility and invention… not an unusual diet for theatre majors or their professors. "We have options," says Rachel Steck, lighting designer and technical director. "We might use community facilities like the Elsinore or the Salem Public Library, or we can use 'found space' like a parking garage or tents on the Quad. The space defines the project." Working in a parking garage might cause concern for pre-med majors, but it's great stuff for students who seek a career in professional theatre.

"We offer students an experience that is unique among small liberal arts universities," says Susan Coromel, department co-chair and associate professor of theatre. "First-year students at Willamette play key roles in design, management and acting. At larger schools and at schools with graduate programs in theatre, there is increased competition for opportunities. No one gets lost here.

"From theory to practice, our students leave here with everything they need to succeed in this field," she adds. "They are comfortable with set construction, lighting, costume design, acting…whatever it takes to make the production work."

Right now what it takes is an upgraded, safe, responsive environment that will allow approximately 125 students a year — majors and non-majors — to work and learn in a state-of-the-art facility. And for the more than 1,000 Willamette alumni who learned their craft in the old playhouse, it will be an outstanding place to visit and, for some, a special place to work as a guest artist or artist in residence.

With construction estimated at between $4 million and $5 million, the University seeks partners interested in this worthy project. If you would like additional details on how to participate, please contact Ellen Bussing, assistant vice president of major gifts, at 503-370-6414 or by email at ebussing@willamette.edu.