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News
Entertainment
Communities
Directories
Classifieds
Shopping
Cars
Jobs
Homes
Cu

Events
Shows
Movies
Outdoors
Dining
Dating

Events Calendar

June - July

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23

Click on a date for a list of events.

events

Inside 'Elephant Man' Bas Bleu production focuses on the man behind the face

By STACY NICK
StacyNick@coloradoan.com

Instead of showing the horrible disfigurement of John Merrick, more commonly known as the "Elephant Man," Cathy Reinking left the stage makeup and the drama behind.

"Once exposed on stage, he won't be deformed," said Reinking, who is directing Bas Bleu's new play "The Elephant Man." "We're trying to reflect his inner soul instead of projections of what he looked like, which was pretty hideous. I've seen it the other way already. I want to reflect his inner life - he was such a beautiful person."

The play tells the story of Merrick's rise from obscurity and ridicule to fame and respect after being taken in by famed Dr. Frederick Treves. Merrick's severe deformity, believed to have been caused by Proteus Syndrome or



Bradley Wakoff/The Coloradoan

Robert Reid, left, as Dr. Treves, and Stetson Weddle as John Merrick star in Bas Bleu Theatre's production of 'The Elephant Man.'

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"Elephant Man's Disease," which causes abnormal, unchecked growth of bones and skin, made him legendary, but the play focuses on his kind nature and rise beyond his appearance.

"It deals with issues of appearances but also of charity and goodness," Reinking said, adding Merrick became almost a celebrity among aristocrats enabling him to cross class lines, something unheard of at the time.

In addition to simple makeup, the production will use a setting, Reinking said. "I wanted to emphasize the actors and not have them be overwhelmed by stage craft," she noted.

'The Elephant Man'

When: June 17 through July 23; 7:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays with 2:30 p.m. matinees July 3, 10 and 17 and 7:30 p.m. shows July 7, 14 and 21

Where: Bas Bleu Theatre, 401 Pine St.

Cast: Stetson Weddle, John Merrick; Robert Reid, Frederick Treves/Belgian policeman; Wendy Ishii, Mrs. Kendall/Pinhead; Kurt Brighton, Ross/Bishop Walsham How/Snork/Lord John; Greg Clark, Pinhead Manager/London Policeman/ Will/Earl; L. Michael Scovel, Carr Gomm/Conductor; Tamara Todres, Pinhead/Miss Sandwich/Countess/Princess Alexandra; directed by Cathy Reinking

Cost: opening night tickets \$25; \$17 for adults; \$12 for seniors 65 and older and \$10 for students; Thursday and Sunday matinees are two for one

Information and tickets: www.basbleu.org or 498-8949

Reinking doesn't want audiences over thinking the play.

"It's a very emotional piece, not intellectual," she said. "I hope that they will be moved."

To add to the experience, cellist Sarah Studebaker will play during performances.

Reinking, former casting manager for NBC, said she had no problem mining Fort Collins' acting talent for a small but powerful cast.

"Stetson Weddle (who plays Merrick) is a brilliant actor," Reinking noted. "I like his simplicity."

The move from working with television to the stage was a welcome change, added Reinking, who worked on shows including "Frasier" and "Arrested Development."

"I always liked actors; I like to be around them," Reinking said, calling her work in theater more artistically stimulating. "It enriches my life more."

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