

Cuckoo — or not?

Theater Works presents abstract version of classic novel

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DAILY NEWS-SUN

You think this is too horrible to have really happened, this is too awful to be the truth. But please. It's still hard for me to have a clear mind thinking on it. But it's the truth even if it didn't happen."

And with that the audience is transported into the mind of a schizophrenic, Chief Bromden, in Theater Works' presentation of "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest." The audience views the world through the Chief's eyes with all of its impurities ripped open, bleeding raw.

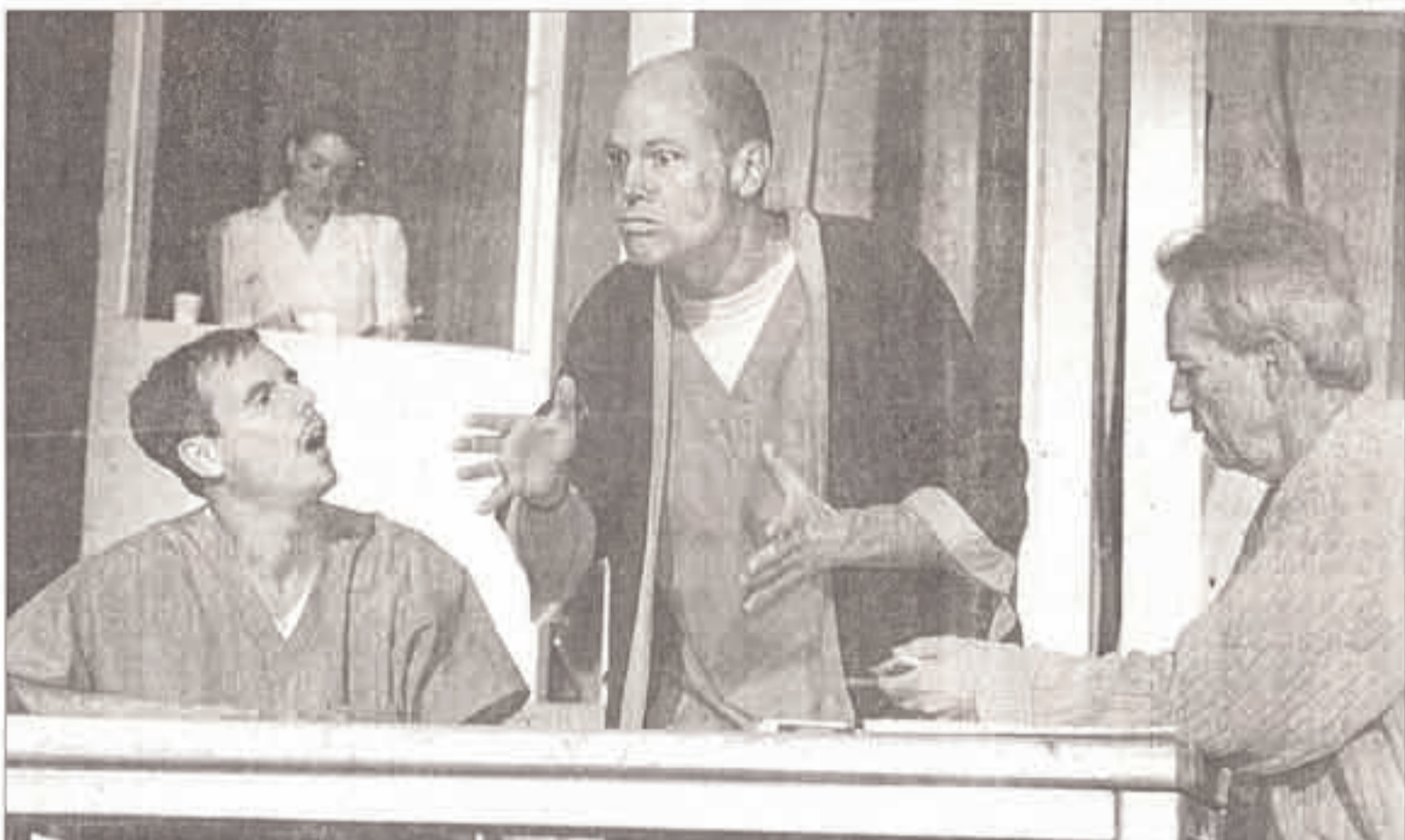
"I never wanted the audience to feel safe," said Susan Morrell, director of the play running at Peoria's Theater Works, 9850 W. Peoria Ave., from Saturday through April 22. "It's the struggle for human dignity in a world of disorder."

Morrell's version of the 1962 Ken Kesey novel, which went from book to play in 1963 and then into a movie starring Jack Nicholson in 1975, revolves around the Dale Wasserman adaptation, with Morrell, a Peoria resident, adding a twist.

"It's an abstraction," Morrell said of the set, which has several levels with door frames, windows, ramps, stairs and chairs scattered about. "It's not a normal playing field for actors."

Which appeals to experienced actors like Ron Hunting, who plays the leading role of R.P. McMurphy, a man sent to the mental ward from the Pendleton Farm for Correction because he has shown signs of being a psychopath.

"I've seen about three different versions of the play and this is the first one done from the abstract way of the book," said Hunting, a resident of Peoria. "The set has many different levels. It is really the viewpoint from a character as



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Cheswick (Grant Bashore), center, talks about nurse Flinn (Emily Sinnott), background, with fellow inmates Martini (Chris Morice) and Harding (Brian Hurley) in a scene from "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest." The play is being performed at Peoria's Theater Works through April 22.

opposed to the audience.

"It's harder for the actors," Hunting said of moving around the uneven stage. "I'm enjoying it because it is not the same thing. It's a challenge."

The abstract set was in answer to another challenge Morrell faced early on during her quest to bring a schizophrenic's view to the play, which is the route Kesey's novel took with Chief Bromden narrating.

"How do I bring the novel to life?" Morrell asked. "It came to me in three parts: sets, light and sound, and the characters."

The 18-member cast is filled with imperfect characters, ranging from the militant Nurse Ratched to Billy Bibbit, the youngest inmate who has stuttered since the first time he spoke. "Mmm... mmm... mmm..."

The play centers around the Chief and McMurphy as the latter figures out early on (which is a major switch from the movie version) that the former isn't as deaf and dumb as everyone believes. The Chief is deemed a Chronic — in the mental ward for good — by his fellow inmates and workers while McMurphy is part of the Acutes, those patients who are still curable.

A memorable scene during the first act of the two-hour play is when McMurphy answers Dr. Spivey's inquire about "feigning psychosis to escape the drudgery of the work farm," with, "Doctor, do I look like a sane man?"

"McMurphy is one of those characters that everyone wants to try in their life," Hunting said. "It's a classic character. It's one of those few plays where if you tell a friend

IF YOU GO

- **WHAT:** One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest
- **WHEN:** Saturday to April 22, various days and times
- **WHERE:** Theater Works' main stage, 9850 W. Peoria Ave., Peoria
- **HOW MUCH:** \$15 for adults, \$14 for seniors and children
- **INFORMATION:** 815-7930

you're in Cuckoo's Nest, nine out of 10 will come to see Jack Nicholson.

"The biggest challenge is not to fall into that," because it is so easy to fall into that," Hunting said of playing a part made famous by an Academy Award winning actor. "We are already dressing him different. And (our) McMurphy is more broad, he blends with the characters instead of the characters blending with him."

One of the characters McMurphy blends with is fellow Acute Martini, played by Peoria resident Chris Morice in his first major theatrical work.

"We've all passed the tall fence going down the street where you thought it was a mental ward," Morice said. "If you have ever wondered what went on in a mental ward, this will give you a good idea of what happens inside. It's an emotional roller coaster. And places like this exist."

"Makes you uneasy doesn't it," Morrell said. "Who's state of reality are we in anyway? My state of reality is different than yours."

Morrell brings all the realities expertly to life in "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest" largely in part to a year's worth of research in preparation for directing this famous play.

"I found myself immersed in his (Ken Kesey) life and his experiences," she said. "It was then I knew I had to direct this play."

Morrell's abstract version of the play begins at 8 p.m. Saturday and continues at 2 and 7 p.m. Sunday. The play will run through April 22 every Thursday (8 p.m.), Friday (8 p.m.), Saturday and Sunday. The two-act production has some hard language and adult situations. For information call 815-7930.



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Inmate R.P. McMurphy (Ron Hunting), center, discusses his sanity with Dr. Spivey (Martin Foxwell) while Scanlon (Jason Smolesky), left, listens on during the first act of "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest."



MOLLIE J. HOPPE/DAILY NEWS-SUN

In Theater Works' presentation of "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest," the audience sees the action through the eyes of Chief Bromden (Marco Valadez).



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Cheswick (Grant Bashore) left, performs his version of a prayer with fellow inmate Harding (Brian Hurley) during "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest," a two-hour play running through April 22 at Peoria's Theater Works.