

COOL PICKS

THINGS TO DO IN THE UPCOMING WEEK

TONIGHT

TANNERY LECTURE SERIES

The Tannery's 2010-11 lecture series closes tonight with a presentation from the Santa Cruz Council of All Beings, featuring artists Cathleen O'Connell, Stephen Lynch, Dustin Wright and Lucy Martin, on the question of how the world might be different if native plants and animals had a say in the decisions of how we live. Join the conversation at 7 p.m. at the Tannery's Community Room 117. You can catch it live at www.livestream.com/tannerylectureseries.

FRIDAY

STARSHIP

OK, so it's not going to equal last month's epic James Durbin show, but the reliable summer free concert series at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk strikes up again Friday with two shows of Starship, featuring Mickey Thomas, and goes every Friday through Labor Day. Two free shows on the Boardwalk's bandstand begin at 6:30 and 8:30 p.m. Bring blankets and get there early. Details: www.beachboardwalk.com.

SATURDAY

JAPANESE CULTURAL FAIR

For the 25th year, the Santa Cruz Japanese Cultural Fair will celebrate all things Japan at the Mission Plaza Park, in front of Holy Cross Church. The fair features a wide variety of activities, from taiko performances to storytelling to the art of Japanese tea ceremonies and shakuhachi, the Japanese bamboo flute. It all takes place Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Details: www.jfcsantacruz.org.



THURSDAY JUNE 16, 2011

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A 'Full' Summer



Cabrillo Stage marks its 30th year with a showstopping new season, highlighted by inspired-by-the-movies hits 'The Full Monty' and 'Hairspray'

By WALLACE BAINE

wbaine@santacruzsentinel.com

If you're a lover of top-flight musical theater, and you can't find worthwhile live entertainment this summer in Santa Cruz County, well, it's your own fault.

Certainly, the folks at Cabrillo Stage, the professional music theater group that sets up house at Cabrillo College each summer, are living up to their end of the bargain.

To mark its 30th year entertaining the masses, Cabrillo Stage is presenting three new productions, including two grand showstoppers. The first of those showstoppers is "The Full Monty," Terrence McNally's popular comedy based on the famous British film.

"Monty" begins the big Cabrillo Stage summer on June 24. It's followed by the two-person one-act musical revue "The Last Five Years," an ingenious song cycle between a couple as they fall in and out of love, opening July 8. And, finally, the summer reaches a crescendo with the high-energy, dance-heavy "Hairspray," winner of eight Tony Awards, which, like "The Full Monty," is inspired by the film of the same name. "Hairspray" opens July 22.

What's more, in commemoration of that big round-numbered anniversary, the company is welcoming back its founding artistic director, the legendary Lile Cruse to lead

SEE 'MONTY' ON D2



ABOVE: The cast of Cabrillo Stage's dare-to-bare comedy 'The Full Monty' includes, from left, Darin Daily, Dan Housek, Kyle Payne, Kevin High, Jarrod Washington and Andrew Willis-Woodward.

LEFT: Cabrillo Stage's artistic director Jon Nordgren has programmed an ambitious schedule, including three summer productions and the return of the company's iconic former leader Lile Cruse.

JANA MARCUS/CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



FOX SEARCHLIGHT

Brad Pitt (with Laramie Eppler) is a stern Texas father in the elegaic epic 'The Tree of Life.'

Malick's 'Tree' bewitching, frustrating

By WALLACE BAINE

wbaine@santacruzsentinel.com

For most of my life as a moviegoer, I've always most admired films with "reach" — that is, films that set out to push beyond the boundaries of storytelling as we know it, or to make thematic or metaphorical connections that are usually the realm of our finest art.

Terrence Malick's magisterial "Tree of Life" is very much a film with reach. It aspires to be nothing short of a contemporary American myth, in which characters are better understood as archetypes and every scene is rife with symbols and motifs.

But, though Malick reaches, he grasps precious little. The meditative tone and the sense of portent in the film will put you in a suitable place for a transcendent experience. In the end, though, the film is diaphanous in the extreme, a lovely cloud, arresting in its uniqueness, that floats across your vision, leaving you little but a pleasurable afterglow. That, and a whole lot of questions.

The thematic aim of "Tree of Life" — at least, as I understand it — is to use one life story as a template for man's struggle to find God, and as a means to tie a single individual's lifetime to the story of the cosmos.

SEE 'TREE' ON D2

FILM REVIEW

'THE TREE OF LIFE'

★★½

DIRECTED BY: Terrence Malick
STARRING: Brad Pitt, Jessica Chastain, Hunter McCracken
RATED: PG-13 for adult themes
LENGTH: 2 hours, 18 minutes
THEATERS: The Nickelodeon



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The acclaimed jazz man Wynton Marsalis, who turns 50 later this year, has gone from young hot shot to a Pulitzer Prize-winning composer to a jazz ambassador.

MUSIC

The art of being Wynton Marsalis

The great trumpeter and jazz ambassador brings his big band to Santa Cruz

By RICHARD SCHEININ

features@santacruzsentinel.com

Here's a bit of information to turn your head: Wynton Marsalis turns 50 this October. That's right. The kid you saw playing "My Funny Valentine" so beautifully, like an old soul, when he was 19 and the talk of the jazz world — the new kid on trumpet with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers — has been around for half a century.

The young man who dazzled on classical concertos and Bud Powell tunes went on to diss electric Miles and stake a flag for the tradition of

swing. He ticked off some fans (they thought he was Ronald Reagan with

a horn) and galvanized others (they thought he was a radical truth teller). He composed gospel-jazz suites and won a Pulitzer Prize and collaborated with flamenco guitarists and Willie Nelson and, of course, led his own quartets and quintets and a big band, too. Now, he's on the cusp of old.

And he's on the phone from New York; Marsalis, the most widely recognized figure in jazz, is about to bring the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra — his 15-piece big band — to Santa Cruz. And he is a gentle pleasure in conversation, thoughtful-

SEE MARSALIS ON D2





JANA MARCUS/CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

'The Full Monty,' which tells the story of a group of working-class American men who become a risqué dance troupe after losing their jobs, was a hit on Broadway for two years after its 2000 debut. It's based on the popular 1997 British film of the same name.

'MONTY'

Continued from D1

the band for "Hairspray." Cruse will team up with another Cabrillo Stage veteran, director Janie Scott. The two are responsible for many of the company's most well-remembered productions, from "Peter Pan" to "Some Like It Hot."

"Lile was one of my mentors," said current artistic director Jon Nordgren. "I've known him forever and, as far as him coming back goes, I had only one condition: that he put me in the band."

The season kicks off with "The Full Monty," which shot to pop-culture fame following the release of the 1997 indie film. The musical, which debuted in San Diego in 2000 and played on Broadway for two years, retains much of the film's plot — suddenly unemployed working-class guys decide to become strippers to earn back a bit of attention from their wives as well as self-respect.

What's different is the story's orientation — it's been Americanized with the men being steel workers from Buffalo — and the addition of music, featuring such songs as "It's a Woman's World," "Michael Jordan's Ball" and "Let it Go."

"The show is inherently funny," said "Monty" director Dustin Leonard. "It's one of those shows that can be a lot of things. For instance, it

IF YOU GO

'THE FULL MONTY'

PRESENTED BY: Cabrillo Stage
DIRECTED BY: Dustin Leonard
WHEN: Opening June 24. Playing Thursday through Saturday at 7:30 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. Through Aug. 14.
WHERE: The Crocker Theater, on the campus of Cabrillo College
COST: \$16 to \$28 adult; \$16 to \$30 seniors; \$16 to \$26 kids 6 to 12
DETAILS: www.cabrillostage.com

can be a circus of slapstick on stage. That's not where I'm going with it. I'm focusing on the situations and the characters and the challenges they face, with a focus on the underlying insecurities of the men. But it's still very funny. You just can't get away from the humor."

You also can't get away from the nudity. As every savvy pop-culture observer has known for years, the play's title is a British slangism for going fully nude. But Leonard is quick to add that the nudity in "The Full Monty" is in no way sexualized. It's more a compelling symbol for the characters' confronting their fears and coming to terms with their true selves.

"There's nudity and there's

sexuality, but those are totally different animals," said Leonard. "(The nudity) is not meant to be sexual or arousing at all. It's about men looking at themselves in a freeing way. Pieces like this allow us to hold up a mirror to our ideas about who we are."

"It's definitely for mature audiences," said Nordgren of "Monty." "People think that a young audience might be more attracted to it, and they couldn't imagine older audiences wanting to see this. Older folks are more enlightened about these things than you think. I'm not worried about people complaining. People have complained about every show we've done. You should have heard them about 'Cabaret' (last year's production)."

Indeed, the characters of "The Full Monty" are not the chiseled bodies of sexualized daydreams. They come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, many of which have been deemed something less than attractive in contemporary culture. One of the characters is typically played by a demonstrably overweight actor to bring out the show's body-acceptance themes.

"These are guys everybody can identify with," said Leonard. "And they're wrestling with the questions that a lot of men are dealing with. 'Am I a good husband?' 'Am I a good father?' 'Am I still attractive?' I love pulling that out of the show."

Being staged later in the summer, "The Last Five Years" is a show focused on the pitfalls of modern

romance. It features Andrew Ceglie and Ariel Buck, who were both involved in the Cabrillo Stage production of "I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change," the last two years. Ceglie's role finds him singing songs about the beginning of an exciting relationship while his female counterpart sings about the relationship in reverse, with the songs about the breakup first.

"Hairspray," based on the famous movie by John Waters, is a huge crowd-pleaser that focuses on the famously rotund heroine Tracy Turnblad and her efforts to integrate the 1960s-era TV show on which she becomes a dance champion. The show was performed more than 2,500 times on Broadway.

Cabrillo Stage also announced that it will have a new holiday production called "Plaid Tidings" in December, a spin-off of the popular musical "Forever Plaid." This ambitious new season comes on the heels of severe cutbacks at Cabrillo College, which provides a small fraction of Cabrillo Stage's operating budget plus, more importantly, the world-class facility at the Crocker Theater and other valuable in-kind considerations.

"It's hard to talk about because the decisions have not been made," said Nordgren of the precarious state of the college's support for Cabrillo Stage. "We don't want to lose anything of what we have. But I'm confident we'll continue on."

'TREE'

Continued from D1

There is no better man to make such a film than the famously methodical Malick, who's made five films — that's counting "Tree" — over the course of 38 years, each one of them imbued with a very different sense of time than what the movie-going masses are used to.

Malick has often been called — and not always kindly — a cinematic mystic, and "Tree of Life" will do nothing to chase away that impression. But does his latest opus shake off the bonds of human-scale time and space to unveil some singular cosmic truth? Mindful that repeat viewings of a film like this can reveal other levels, I would have to say, no.

Part of the problem here is the expectation game. "Tree of Life" came away with the top prize at the recent Cannes Film Festival, gaining in the process an army of evangelists not shy about creating the impression that this was a movie about to put God back into science and make religion obsolete. The title itself invites that kind of grandiosity.

The film, ironically, could have used more of that grandiosity. The story around which

the film is built is a coming-of-age tale set in Waco, Texas, in the 1950s. Brad Pitt plays the patriarch of a middle-class family, an inventor and failed musician who raises his three boys with unsurprisingly paternalistic sternness. Jessica Chastain plays Pitt's mournful wife.

The fulcrum of the story is the oldest son Jack, played as a youth by Hunter McCracken and as an adult by Sean Penn. We learn earlier on that one of Jack's brothers is destined to die as a youth, though we're never told how. It is through Jack's vision that we experience his growing-up story, and Malick is most successful in keeping the story impressionistic, as seen through the prism of memory and childhood innocence.

That story is interrupted early on, however, with a dramatic extended sequence drawing from the birth of the universe and the cosmological chain of events [including dinosaurs] that led to the birth of man, but then it's right back to Waco where Jack grows to explore his world and resent his parents in a very epochal, even biblical sense.

However, Penn, as the adult Jack, does nothing but wander about vaguely sinister modern landscapes and stare off into the distance, only to resur-

face at the end in a — spoiler alert — weird, hard-to-fathom afterlife.

What I found so beguiling was the film's hints at transcendence. The film is punctuated by whispered prayers, looking for answers from an inscrutable creator, and though the film doesn't supply an answer to that eternal question "Why do we have to die?" — I mean, how can you expect such a thing? — it's moving to hear that question asked.

My problem with "Tree of Life" is not its cosmological ambition, but that it was not quite ambitious enough. After the long birth-of-the-universe sequence, we have to be content in Waco where the camera is constantly looking skyward through the treetops. The cosmology felt more designed to bedazzle than enlighten, yet

without it, we're left with a growing-up-in-the-'50s story, and how many of those have you seen already?

Ultimately, "Tree of Life" is concerned with the notion of grace. What is it? Where does it come from? How do we apply it to our lives? But like the character meant to embody grace — Jack's beautiful but detached mother — it remains frustratingly elusive.

Let's hope "Tree of Life" serves as an influence to films willing to go further down the same path of transcendence, instead of the last word on the subject. It's not the masterpiece that it sets out to be, but I would recommend all seriously inclined filmgoers to see it, on the grounds that even a film that never quite grabs what it reaches for can open your eyes to what could be.



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MARSALIS

Continued from D1

ly considering questions and asking his own questions, still fascinated by music and, yes, tradition, as well as the whole nature of a great instrumentalist's individual sound.

"On the horn, you can work on technical aspects," he says, "but in terms of whatever comes out through your personality to create that special sound — it's mystical, I think. I've asked a lot of musicians that exact same question. No one has an answer. I've asked Sonny Rollins, Miles (Davis), John Lewis, Elvin Jones. Everybody says they work on trying to be direct, to go deeper or be more honest in their sound. But there's never any snappy answer that you can quote — nothing like, 'Eureka, here's the answer.'"

The eureka happens when a great player lifts his horn and plays: There's the sound. Maybe you saw the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra at the Monterey Jazz Festival two years ago. Marsalis is the group's music director; really, it's his band. But, as usual, he was seated in the back row with the other trumpets, playing the section parts, not grandstanding in the least.

But the guy can't help it. Playing out in the arena, a giant venue, with a sold-out crowd of about 7,000 in front of him, he lifted his horn on one of the tunes — it was Joe Henderson's "A Shade of Jade" — and started to blow a solo that turned the arena into a bubble, Wynton's bubble, filled with his golden cascading lines, his growls and, above all, his infectious swing, inciting the rhythm section to the point that the entire band's performance was elevating beneath him. You could hear the love in every one of his notes. Here was his sound, an inspired sound.

On the phone, I ask him what it means to be musically inspired: "I think it means you have a connection, and that connection is sacred to you and that you're willing to do what you have to do to protect and project it."

And what's the connection to?

"I don't know what you would call it. It's like a spiritual consciousness, an essence, an understanding. You can have a bond with a person like that, too, and you have to protect that and to project it and work on it. Because you can lose it."

But the conversation is getting a little serious. Marsalis turns it around: "Hey, man, what instrument do you play?"

Saxophone, used to play alto.

"Do you still play?"

Nah, wasn't good enough. Gave it up in my 20s.

"Why not just play for the fun of playing?" he asks. "You know, playing is fun."

Is it still fun for Marsalis?

There's a long pause, because this is obviously

kind of a stupid question. "Yeah. Oh, man, it's the most fun in the world."

He starts talking about the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, filled with exceptional players: trumpeters Ryan Kisor and Marcus Printup, saxophonists Sherman Irby, Ted Nash, Walter Blanding and Joe Temperley, and drummer Ali Jackson. Those are a few of the musicians who make the fun for Marsalis and the band, which performs regularly in New York and around the world. These men are old-fashioned road warriors; the upcoming dates in this region are part of a seven-week tour of the U.S., Canada and Europe.

"The band is better and better," he says, like a proud pop. "We're in, like, a golden period for the band, because we have so many people who can arrange and play. So it's one of the easiest periods for the band."

Well, financing the band, keeping it operating and touring — that isn't easy. "It's uphill all the time," Marsalis says. "I remember one year, 1988 or '87, it was rough. But it's just a matter of raising money. If you stick with it — we have a lot of die-hard support that's kept it going."

"And we're always thinking about people, the audience," he continues. "Otherwise, I could stay home, right? I'm not playing because I need you all to watch me play! We try to bring something always on the road for the people, something that can represent the entire history of the music. But we bring our original tunes, too, and we vary it. And the stuff that people seem to like more, we play more."

"People seem to like the band. We've got so many soloists, and people like the colors of the orchestra, and we've been playing a wide range of music for a long time, everything from music of New Orleans" — Marsalis' hometown — "to something new from Ted Nash. We've done a lot of Blue Note music. We did (Thelonious) Monk's music. We did Chick Corea's music; that was a great show this year at Lincoln Center."

"We do nursery rhymes, too," Marsalis says.

Nursery rhymes? "Man, we do 'Old MacDonald Had a Farm.' 'Mahna Mahna.' 'Pop Goes the Weasel.' 'Brahms' Lullaby.' 'It's Not Easy Being Green.'"

He starts singing Kermit the Frog's old tune from "Sesame Street":

It's not that easy being green;

Having to spend each day the color of the leaves.

Then the Pulitzer Prize winner continues: "I arranged 'La Cucaracha.' I arranged 'Three Blind Mice.' We don't play that one that much. We play 'Itsy Bitsy Spider.'"

He whistles it. "People love that stuff," Marsalis says. "And it doesn't sound like a kids' show; it sounds like jazz music. Let me tell you something: That arrangement of 'Rubber Duckie' is hard."

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