

Not Just Another Pretty Face

Eugene's Robert Cabell is way off Broadway.

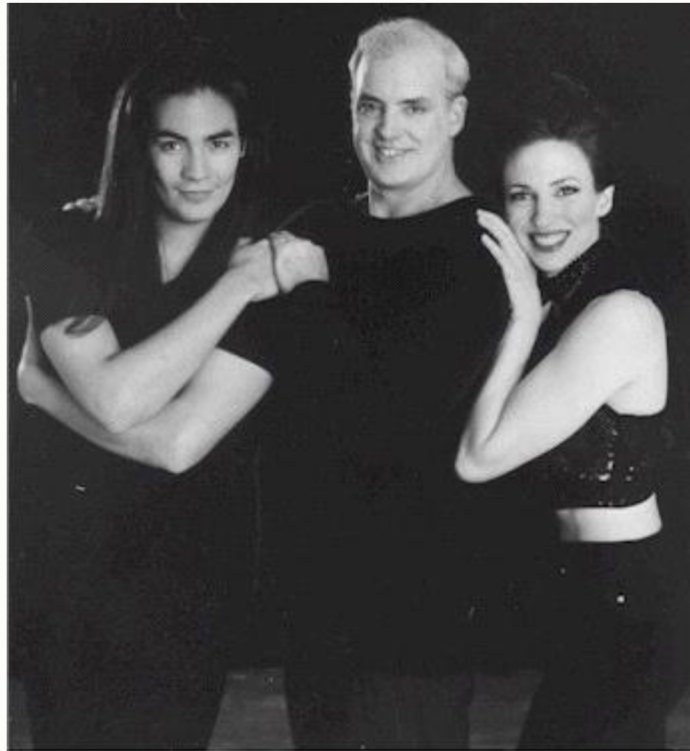
BY TIM O'ROURKE

Ask former Eugenian Robert Cabell about his career as a playwright, videographer, columnist, producer, actor and documentarian and he won't stop talking. But he's not the egomaniacal New Yorker with a creative streak we see in movies. He answers questions about his success by redirecting the conversation to others he's worked with, pointing out how talented and successful they are.

On the phone in New York, he found time to talk during a hectic schedule that includes releasing a comic book and reworking a theater production. When the subject turned to *Pretty Faces* (Actors Cabaret of Eugene's successful play performed off-Broadway), for which he wrote the music and lyrics, Cabell broke into a monologue about his friends Jim Roberts and Joe Zingo, who run ACE.

When asked about his video editing company, for which he has filmed and edited productions such as *Exonerated*, starring Mia Farrow, Richard Dreyfuss and Jeff Goldblum, the conversation turned to Tony award-winning producer Jane Bergere and the wonderful job she did on this year's *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Cabell's stories sound like they came from an artsy type's dream life – the sort of stuff most of us would include in Christmas cards. But to him, they're only part of the New York art world routine. When he first moved to the city so nice they named it twice (where "everything is compressed," he says), he was waiting in line at a deli, looked up, and saw Dustin Hoffman in front of him ordering a sandwich.

Then there's that old chestnut about Liza Minnelli getting a bathroom door slammed in her face right in front of him. Or the one about Sinatra stopping by for a quick chat with Cabell and a lunch date. You like award shows? He's been to five MTV award shows, nine Tonys and has judged the Daytime Emmys for seven years. But you wouldn't know it by talking to him ... unless you keep prodding him for stories. "He's really down to earth. I think it's his upbringing here [in Eugene]," says Joe Zingo, artistic



(Left) Ruben Gomez (Center) Robert W. Cabell (Left) Deborah Gibson

director at ACE. "He wears sweat clothes. He's grubby most of the time. He's not assuming in any way. Most of the ones who really are good are like that. They're not pretentious at all."

Grubby? Maybe. Successful? Definitely. *Pretty Faces* was a project "inspired by four women in Eugene, written by someone from Eugene, revived in Eugene and brought back to New York," says Cabell. A *Pretty Faces* CD recorded in Eugene recently went on sale. CD Baby (a popular online CD store) has already placed a second order and the CD was picked up by the famous Dress Circle music store in London. But Cabell quickly adds that people are talking about the quality of the sound, not his writing or music, and that it's amazing what the local studios did with his work. Typical.

Since the *Pretty Faces* run, Cabell has written *Z: The Masked Musical*, which was a successful album before its world premiere at ACE. He's currently working on *I, Sara*, a one-woman show premiering at ACE's Annex Theater in February. He's also shopping a documentary he produced about comic book conventions, debuting his comic book *The Hair-Raising Adventures of Jayms Blonde* and making some changes to *Z*. Just don't expect him to tell you how successful he's been.

Ties to Eugene

Robert Cabell finds time to make pilgrimages back to his hometown of Eugene every year. His life has been in New York for nearly three decades, but there are some things the Big Apple can't compare with. "It's a breath of fresh air to come home to Oregon to be with people who aren't neurotic," he says.

OK ... OK. So we're down to earth. But he must miss that Zagat-reviewed food, right? "I ate at Soriah ... and it was wonderful. It rivals anything I've had in New York," he says.

The grandeur of theater in New York must have made the surrounding areas bastions of the dramatic arts, right? "You'd be amazed with the schools on the East Coast. Class plays are still in the cafeteria in Jersey. People do not have a clue to the quality of things that [ACE does]," Cabell says.

There is one reason he keeps his ties in Eugene, and it has nothing to do with theater productions, our lack of neuroses or the skills of Eugene chefs. "I never lost my friends in Eugene," Cabell says.