

# Musical: Play's author is a Eugene native

Continued from Page G3

of things to do before I die. It's very exciting."

The entire cast shares the view that this is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to realize every actor's secret dream. Some of them have been waiting longer than others.

Bruce McCarthy, 50, took a stab at being a professional actor in New York and Los Angeles but put that ambition on the back burner after he had kids. Amanda Fackrell, 21, is a University of Oregon student who will get a late start on fall term because of the New York trip.

Tyler Holden has a UO degree in theater but got a lot of his on-stage experience at Actors Cabaret. Holden's wife, Laura, has no formal training in theater but has always dreamed of performing in New York.

"This is *big*," she says.

Jennifer Hill, the other new cast member, probably would have killed to get in this show. She knew nothing about it until she read a newspaper review of the first Eugene production.

"When I read that it was about a beauty pageant for 'large and lovely women,' I screamed at my husband: 'Where was the audition?' That's me!"

Hill, who describes herself as a "size up-there" woman, says for a long time she bought into the idea "that you can't be large and trendy." After seeing a show that included a big woman in a tailored suit, she switched from sweatshirts and sweat pants to fashionable attire and started holding her head up, looking people in the eye instead of down at her feet.

She says this has changed her attitude about herself and has changed how people respond to her.

Several other cast members bring personal perspectives to their characters and to the show's content in general.

Laura Holden says that always being the tallest in any group she was in has given her some idea what big women experience.

McCarthy says someone he cares about deeply has suffered from "weight discrimination" all her life. Tyler Holden knew one of the women who inspired the show in the first place.

Cabell, who was born in Eugene and graduated from Churchill High School, got his



WAYNE EASTBURN / The Register-Guard

**Erica Jean Pierson and Bruce McCarthy** sing "This Moment is Mine," during ACE's production of the musical "Pretty Faces." The show is one of 31 musicals — chosen from 220 applicants — to be included in the New York Musical Theatre Festival in September.

inspiration for "Pretty Faces" from four women he got to know and like through Actors Cabaret: Tyrita Tracey, Jane Russell Wojick, Marietta Hernandez and Penny Jo Atwood. All four worked with Zingo off and on for many years.

Zingo says it was "the type of energy they had" that inspired Cabell. Interviewed by the Register-Guard's Fred Crafts in January, Cabell summarized the show and the female characters:

"There are no fat jokes. They are lusty, funny, cuddly women."

Original cast member Erica Jean Pierson says she "cried for about two days" after reading the script "because I didn't want to be cast as the fat girl." Roberts says only three women showed up to audition for the first Eugene production of "Pretty Faces," probably because many women felt the same way.

Pierson is now glad she overcame those feelings.

"This is the best thing that's ever happened to me," she says. "It's made my dream come true."

Pierson says working on "Pretty Faces" has given everyone involved skills in textual analysis and experience in building characters from a script without much dialogue.

"It was a rough script to work with," she says, "but it also was fabulous to bring our

own tastes to it and make changes every day. I feel like we built the show."

"It takes special performers to work on new scripts, when there are no previous performances to look at," Roberts says. "It's actual creativity."

Zingo and his cast had just four weeks to get ready for the West Coast premiere in January, working with playwright Cabell, who also wrote the lyrics and the music. They needed all that time just to learn the songs and work out the choreography.

This time around, Zingo says, he and the actors are developing back stories for their characters, motivations and rationales that will guide the way they act and help them sell their songs, including the poignant "Too Plump for Prom Night" and "Daddy Doesn't Love Me," the comedic "I'm Twirlin' for Jesus," the naughty "Solo for the Telephone" and the male duet "Knight in Paper Armor."

Zingo says he would like each female character to reveal a different facet of a big woman's emotional life and the two male characters to represent all the negative and positive information that plus-size women get from men.

Although taking "Pretty Faces" to New York will be a big adventure for the actors — two of whom have never been to the city even as tourists — it

will be a homecoming of sorts for Cabell, who left Eugene for the Big Apple shortly after graduating from Churchill High and was an Equity actor by the time he was 20. Cabell now lives in New Jersey.

"Pretty Faces" opened in a small New York theater in 1985 and did well enough to move to an off-Broadway venue in 1990. The show also got good reviews there, but it closed abruptly because the promoters failed to file some required legal papers.

The show was extensively reworked for the Eugene performances in January and is being revised even more in preparation for the Eugene performances starting Friday and for the New York performances between Sept. 21 and Sept. 27.

"This time we're making it our own," Zingo says.

Organizers hope the New York Musical Theatre Festival will become to contemporary musical theater what Robert Redford's Sundance Festival is to movies.

The inaugural festival will present 65 productions in 19 venues, over 21 days, plus other events. Almost 1,000 actors and musicians will be involved.

Along with shows such as "Pretty Faces," the festival will include 15 new musicals in the Next Link Project. Roberts and Zingo already have made arrangements to stage the Next Link winner, "Like You Like It," in Eugene next year.