

One-night performing wonder

"Audience of One" - Jodi Eichelberger's solo show Tuesday requires audience participation

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Opera singer, puppeteer, actor, emcee, voice artist, writer, composer: Jodi Eichelberger, 36, has done it all.

He's performed in Poland, studied in London, been part of South Carolina's acclaimed Spoleto Festival, filmed for television in Iceland. Based in New York for the past four years, he was featured in the first cast of "Avenue Q" on Broadway, and more recently played the role of Stingy on CBS' children's show "LazyTown." He spent time in Portland as artistic leader of Tears of Joy puppet theater, and audiences here may know him best as emcee Alfred Bell with Tapestry Theatre Company's yearly "Christmas From Home," a changing 1940s radio-style show for which he comes back to Portland each December to perform.

You'll find him on Tapestry's stage again for the next few weeks in this year's version, "1942 Christmas From Home." But this time around he also has something new up his sleeve -- the premiere of an interactive show that he'll perform in Portland once only, on Tuesday.

"An Audience of One" is an evening of personal narrative that involves some preparation by the audience. You download the soundtrack from Eichelberger's Web site, bring your iPod or MP3 player to the theater, and listen along with the onstage happenings. On his Web site is a collection of podcasts of personal moments and events in his life. With help from Portland actors Sam Mowry, Cindy McGean and Aaron Keating from the Willamette Radio Workshop, plus fellow LazyTown actor Julie Westwood, Eichelberger will spin these moments out, radio-style, for audience members while they also listen along. At one point, they can even decide from three choices what kind of musical soundtrack they want to play during the narrative.

Eichelberger, a Lewis & Clark College grad, was inspired by National Public Radio's "This American Life" and an experience he had in England.

"In London, I went to a pub theater, and I was the only person who showed up for the performance," he said. "It turned out it was a one-man show, a ballet of 'Wuthering Heights.' I realized I had no idea how to be an audience by myself. I was the only one keeping the performance going, really.

"And then, I started thinking about other situations where that kind of energy, of being an audience of one, can happen."

Eichelberger has taken from his own experiences to create podcasts: Swimming in geothermal pools in Gottleber, Iceland, where he spent many months filming "Lazytown," a show using live action, puppetry and computer-generated environment; composing a musical with a friend based on an obscure Grimm fairy tale; and most of all, exploring the idea of being an audience of one.

"This particular evening is structured around stories that have to do with finding yourself," he said.

Being at a microphone -- a mainstay of radio theater -- is something Eichelberger loves.

"Growing up, I watched the Olympics, and everyone would say, 'Gosh, I'd love to be an ice-skater or a gymnast.' The thing I wanted to be was the guy who announced the scores."

The draw of the microphone is one reason he returns from New York nearly every December to perform in Tapestry's "Christmas From Home" series about the holiday during World War II in Portland.

"This show is so much fun to do, and I love that it's so specific to the locale. And it sounds so shallow, but I really do love speaking into a microphone."