

Portland Center Stage sets the table for 'I Love to Eat' and other foodie treats



(<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/mhughley/index.html>) By **Marty Hughley**, The Oregonian
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Rob Nagle stars as the influential Oregonian chef James Beard in "I Love to Eat" at Portland Center Stage.

Patrick Weishampel

Talk about your historical symmetries.

A century ago, Portland was, the hometown of the highly influential chef and food writer **James Beard**

(<http://www.jamesbeard.org/about/james-beard>) and now has become a highly influential culinary locale in its own right. Similarly fitting is that before making his mark as an exponent of a distinctly American gourmet food culture, Beard pursued a career in theater, and now he's (further) immortalized in a biographical play.

Portland Center Stage will present "I Love to Eat," (<http://www.pcs.org/eat/>) a one-man show about Beard's life, on its main stage next month. (The play, by Los Angeles playwright James Still, **premiered at Indiana Rep in 2011** (<http://www.indystar.com/article/20110930/ENTERTAINMENT/109300360/Review-Eat-captures-Beard-s-zest-life>).)

One of the steps on the path to its Jan. 11 opening was a photo shoot to create advance publicity materials. And, considering the show's subject and title, that meant making some food.

So PCS held an in-house contest, doling out recipes of classic American dishes to members of its staff, encouraging them to riff a bit, and using the results for a photo. Then the dishes were tasted and judged, the winner earning its cook a four-day stay on

the Oregon coast.

Your (partially) honorable panel of judges: director Jessica Kubzansky, actor Rob Nagle, and...me.

On a recent Friday afternoon, we stared down a long counter covered in casseroles -- 15 of them -- and a large ham.

“The ham is not part of the contest,” public relations manager Natalie Gilmore cautioned.

“It’s a palette cleanser,” quipped her boss, Cynthia Fuhrman

We tasted a bite or two of each dish, taking notes along the way, then ducked into the rehearsal hall to hash out (sorry) a consensus.

Which proved surprisingly difficult. We all liked the scalloped plum tomatoes, for instance, but there were two versions; Nagle and I preferred one, Kubzansky the other. A savory squash casserole was a big favorite of the other judges, but I’d not given it a careful tasting, having found an unwelcome crunch (a stray bit of glass -- speaking of taking a bite of each dish!) in my forkful. I found myself lobbying hard for, of all things, a ham loaf topped with pineapple rings and surrounded by hunks of sweet potato. Around we went, the “40 cloves of garlic chicken,” the corn pudding and other worthy contenders falling to the process of negotiation. Eventually, the squash -- its container malfunction largely forgiven -- won out.

The publicity photos, with a patina of mid-century Americana, make for a mouthwatering advertisement. And PCS will be serving up other ways to sate Portlanders appetite for food and food info.

Fridays and Saturdays, from Jan. 11 to Feb. 2, you can take a sample-laden “culinary walking tour” from Forktown Food Tours in the afternoon, then watch “I Love to Eat” in the evening for a combo price of \$99 (503-234-3663, **forktown.com** (<http://forktown.com/>)).

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