



Off to the glue factory

Equus, the Citadel's season opener, fails to take audiences on a galloping ride

Equus
Directed by James MacDonald
Starring Tom Wood
Runs until 15 October
Citadel Theatre

AMANDA ASH
Arts & Entertainment Editor

A boy stands onstage, clothed in darkness, with a large, magnanimous animal resting its head gently on his shoulder. The two are frozen in time, in a queer, yet strangely empathetic position, the boy's hand trickling down the beast's chest as he gazes lovingly into two large, red eyes.

This is the opening scene of *Equus*, the Citadel Theatre's first production of the season. Director James MacDonald—who has recently become the Citadel's new Associate Artistic Director—summarizes the relationship between a boy and a horse in the first few minutes of passionate stillness, while red lights and shadows splatter across the stage, creating a resonating image of worship.

However, although the play's inception encompasses what the entire performance stands for—the power of love and the intensity of devotion—something gets lost in translation as the play progresses. Much of *Equus'* subject matter is indisputably powerful, but when it comes to the actual performances and set design, the choices fail to click.

Alan Strang (Anthony Johnston), a stable boy, blinds six horses and must

be admitted into a psychiatric clinic under the aid of Dr Martin Dysart (Tom Wood). As the story progresses, audiences discover that the boy has transferred his worship of God onto one of the horses he's cared for. When Alan and Jill Mason (Anastasia Phillips), another girl working at the stables, edge towards hitting the hay together, Alan becomes hysterical as his God—the horse—witnesses his sacrilege.

Audiences do, undoubtedly, acquire the sense that everything has become bleak in comparison to Alan's experience, but that perception simply functions to draw spectators away from the performance rather than into it.

The script itself makes a fine point about the mundane, concrete reality we live in each and every day, arguing that Alan's passion—no matter how psychologically unhealthy it may be—is less mad than the commonplace rituals we perform. However, once that first intimate moment between him and the horse becomes replaced with

bright lighting and a set that resembles an operating room, stable and courtroom all at once, MacDonald instigates a sharp disconnect by whitewashing the emotive responses previously experienced.

In general, *Equus* evolves a feeling of sterility, of empty, passionless banality—a choice MacDonald makes that isn't altogether wrong, but less effective than the earthiness of the first scene. Audiences do, undoubtedly, acquire the sense that everything has become bleak in comparison to Alan's experience, but that perception simply functions to draw spectators away from the performance rather than into it.

Just as the set design strays along an unsuccessful path, so does the acting. Considering the demands placed on the actors—such as when Johnston and Phillips are required to undress themselves completely onstage in order to re-enact the final moments before Alan blinds the horses—there's definitely a challenge set out for them, but in their case, overacting shoves subtlety off to the side. Similarly, Wood performs his character with a little too much drama, contributing to *Equus'* aura of fictitiousness.

Equus encounters a few directorial choices that dilute much of the script's potency, especially when audiences are provoked with such an astonishing introductory scene. Considering it's only the season opener, though, hopefully the Citadel can avoid being thrown into the barn by using *Equus* as an example to work from.

McDOUGALL united church

Science and Religion
A Four-Part Series

Thursdays: October 12, 19, November 2, 9
7:00 - 9:00 p.m. Cost: \$40

McDougall United Church
10025 - 101 Street, Edmonton

Presenters: Dr. Clair Woodbury and Joyce Madsen

To register call 428-1818 or email info@mcDougallunited.com

Details: www.mcdougallunited.com

study abroad FAIR

austria
china
denmark
finland
france
germany
japan
korea
mexico
netherlands
norway
singapore
turkey
united kingdom
united states
... and more!

wednesday, oct 4
SUB 10-3pm

- * discover your international study and work abroad opportunities
- * meet exchange students from all over the world
- * meet U of A students who have studied abroad
- * explore funding opportunities
- * discover the world - discover you!

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA INTERNATIONAL

education abroad program * 8920 HUB Mall * 492.6040
www.international.ualberta.ca * educationabroad@international.ualberta.ca

SUBtitles

Main Floor SUB Regular Hours: Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm
ph: 492 - 9744 Saturday 11am - 4pm

used textbooks and much more...

Buy, Sell or Consign Texts • UofA Crested Clothing & Merchandise
• Framing • Custom Screen Printing and Embroidery

BUY, SELL OR CONSIGN TEXTS

{other services include} • UofA CRESTED CLOTHING AND MERCHANDISE

- FRAMING
- CUSTOM SCREEN PRINTING AND EMBROIDERY

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA STUDENTS UNION

CANADA POSTES CANADA

From anywhere... to anyone

for further information, visit www.su.ualberta.ca



FLOOD MY FIELD, BABY Fields to Flood performed at the Powerplant on Saturday to promote their latest album.