

Cat fetishes as crazy as *World of Warcraft*

Teatro la Quindicina's latest production, *House Of Cats*, tells how our everyday addictions are equivalent to those held by cat women

Preview: *House Of Cats*

Directed by Stewart Lemoine
Starring Chris Burrroughs, Davina Stewart and Leona Brausen
Runs 15 February to 3 March
Varscona Theatre

JONN KMECH
Arts & Entertainment Staff

You know them as the cat women, those crazy ladies who seem to collect felines and reside in their dark, shady abodes with dozens of furry companions. But the next time you're walking quickly by a cat house, trying to avoid eye contact with the frumpy woman who's staring at you, the exuberant cast of *House Of Cats* would like you to think about your blog and your harrowing addiction to online role-playing games.

"The play asks, 'What's crazy?'" notes Chris Bullough, who plays Officer Malcolm Bailey, an Edmonton city bylaw officer investigating a suspected cat house owned by two sisters in Capilano. "Is having tons of cats crazy or is being addicted to *World of Warcraft* crazy? It's about those obsessions we have; why is one crazier than the other?"

"[Bullough]'s character is obsessed with his blog and *World of Warcraft*, and we're obsessed with our cats," continues Davina Stewart, one of the cat sisters. "We can't understand his fascination, then we try to explain why we have all these cats."

This feline fixation is the latest venture directed by veteran Edmonton playwright Stewart Lemoine for Teatro la Quindicina at the Varscona Theatre. This time, Lemoine handed over the writing reins to another prominent Edmonton playwright, Cathleen Rootsart, author of *Mama Mia! Me A Mama?*, *Make Me* and *Abigail In Twilight*. This theatrical collaboration found inspiration from some of Edmonton's zany cat laws, which the performers were schooled in as preparation for their roles by an enthusiastic Edmonton city bylaw officer.

"[The sisters] are reported to the city as having more than six cats, and there's a bylaw in Edmonton that you can't have six or more cats," Stewart explains. "Two or three cat houses are shut down and condemned per year in the city, apparently. You can also get fined \$100 if someone complains about your cat roaming in their yard. As well, [the bylaw officer] gave us all of the paraphernalia of cat houses, like cat carriers and the cat box."

"The cat box looks like a folding chair, for when the cat is like, 'Squee! Squee!'" screams Bullough, rearing back like a rabid kitty. "You take it and go 'bonk,' and it clamps around them so they can't get out. Then you can carry them away in one hand. I got a really good idea of what the job was like for [the officer], short of going to an actual cat house. She's a pretty amazing person to talk to, the bylaw officer. She's hunted for bears



TARASTIEGLITZ

HERE, KITTY KITTY KITTY Teatro la Quindicina's *House Of Cats* will make you question your everyday obsessions.

in the river valley and scaled buildings to get iguanas."

Aside from their education in the intricacies of cat wrangling, Stewart and Bullough are both alumni of the University of Alberta Fine Arts program. With Bullough recently earning a Sterling award for best actor and

Stewart's two decades of experience in the Edmonton acting scene, the crew of *House Of Cats* should have no problem convincing you that there isn't much difference between owning a dozen cats and finally reaching level 70 with your elite Orc shaman.

"You always hear about those cat

ladies and cat houses," Bullough adds. "But then for some reason it's still acceptable in society to say, 'Oh god, I didn't get any sleep last night. I was up all night playing this fantasy game, roaming around being this other character, discovering new lands, fighting and going on raids.'"

Josh Ritter reconnects with roots, plays solo tour



Josh Ritter

With Colin Priestner and John Guliak
Monday, 19 February at 8pm
The Powerplant

ALYSSA PANKIW
Arts & Entertainment Writer

The delicate task of being taken seriously as a young, male singer/songwriter is something rock artist Josh Ritter has struggled with over his decade-long career, but his topical lyrics and intricate instrumentals have helped him find as comfortable a middle ground as an artist can expect.

According to the 29-year-old musician, much of his sound is influenced by his commitment to a dedicated fan base and his awareness of emerging listeners. His latest album, *The Animal Years*, began as a raw exploration of the present, but ultimately became a chance to reconnect with his roots after *Hello Starling*, a more pop-friendly third collection.

"Each time, it's about balancing a new idea for a sound with what you loved about what you did before," Ritter says. "For me, there has to be an optimism—a sense that no matter what, you're not going to leave people with a full-on tragedy. There's so many fragile men with guitars out there who start the record off and it's just bleak; it sounds like they're stabbing a raccoon with a screwdriver. Then the record ends and you think, 'How can all that pain be real?' I never put much stress

on the torture thing."

Ritter does, however, stress the importance of keeping something of himself in his work and his first collaboration with producer, Brian Deck, allowed him the freedom to do just that.

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JOSH RITTER

"A lot of the people I talk to worked on a record and it wasn't about the songs as they were, and about the content of the songs, it was about how we can make them a hit, make them something that's going to fit on the radio," Ritter says. "Deck never said anything like that to me. He made me feel like we were just going to be touching down on this weird planet. He made me see the potential in recording that I see in performing."

Some of that potential led to the unique sound on Ritter's latest album with its rollicking upbeat tracks inspired by his native Idaho and

contrasted by eloquent, often political whispers of songs growing out of his views on the state of the world. This experimental approach towards his music lends to its charm and he admits that he doesn't believe in an album being entirely about one thing.

"I don't really like the concept album very much, because they make the songs serve to the record and not the record serve to the songs. I usually find that when I sit down to write, I get led off in a different direction," Ritter explains. "If you're just trying to write and have fun, the songs are way more slippery. I'll always like some songs for the time that I experience them, and some songs will just keep changing as time goes on."

Josh feels fortunate that his fans also accept this evolution and his decision to bring a solo acoustic tour to Canada at this point in his life. He hasn't hit the road without his band in years, and is excited to get the chance to relive his beginnings, playing in coffee shops as an eager 18-year-old. Now, upon returning to small venues, he's experienced in the importance of artistic balance and the gravity of give and take.

And of fame, Ritter admits it comes second to his first and foremost love: music.

"It's a quick pat on the back, but at the beginning and at the end, it's still you, sitting in your room, trying to get the right word for what you're going to say," Ritter concludes.