



## Frankenstein worthy of love, praise

### Frankenstein

Directed by Jonathan Christenson  
Starring Nick Green, Andrew Kushnir,  
Sarah Machin-Gale, Tracy Penner, Tim  
Machin and George Szilagy  
Runs 8-25 March  
Catalyst Theatre

AMANDA ASH  
Arts & Entertainment Editor

Is there such thing as a beautiful nightmare?

When ghostly figures wrapped in crinkled white paper dance in the haze of multi-coloured lights, one could say that an oxymoron of the type exists. Although most nightmares leave us sweating icicles and clawing at the pits in our stomachs, there are always a few that leave us too enthralled, too intrigued to let the horror take over.

This is a bit what Catalyst Theatre's production of *Frankenstein* is like.

Both hideous and magnificent, *Frankenstein* can only be described as a cross between *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Pan's Labyrinth*. Nurturing a twisted, yet sharp, sense of humour among its vivid images and palpable realism, *Frankenstein* relates the timeless tale of a laboratory-constructed being journeying to find love.

While many will expect the Creature (played by George Szilagy) to make an appearance at the play's outset, he doesn't. The beginning concentrates on the lives and inner workings of the characters that, in some way, play a vital role in the life of Victor Frankenstein (Andrew Kushnir), the Creature's creator. Just like the Creature's journey to find acceptance in a world that's blind to everything and anything except what we deem beautiful, Dr Frankenstein searches for a path towards individuality, towards earning respect.

The mood *Frankenstein* sets is

uncanny, using the eerie simplicity of the characters' demeanor to contrast with eccentric movements and music. Most of the play is narrated by a chorus, creating a sense of Greek antiquity and timelessness that complements the immediacy of the humour.

**Both hideous and magnificent, *Frankenstein* can only be described as a cross between *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Pan's Labyrinth*.**

At times when the atmosphere turns serious, the chorus unexpectedly breaks out into song about Dr Frankenstein's

friend Henry (played by Nick Green). Henry slumps and shuffles his body across the stage in time with the tune, performing in such a comedic manner that it's nearly impossible to refrain from suddenly spurring a loud laugh into the ear of the person sitting in front of you.

As for the script, it's easy to say that playwright Jonathan Christenson projected a clear-cut vision of what *Frankenstein* should be in his mind before writing. Adaptations, as we all know, tend to stray down unnatural artistic paths and dwell on certain themes, but for this production of *Frankenstein*, the entire performance blends nicely from start to finish, giving rise to only a few lulls.

And in relation to the acting, there's really nothing much to say—each and every character's performance is as flawless. Green is the king of outrageous gestures, Tracy Penner (Lucy)

is an adorable teenage sweetheart and Szilagy must eat a bag full of cough drops each night to soothe the sore throat that must accompany the prolonged deep, scratchy voice of the Creature.

But most importantly, *Frankenstein* wouldn't generate the sense of alluring terror it does without the lighting effects and costuming. Everyone dons an outfit made solely from paper and glue, and once the stream of colours reflects off of this unusual getup, the result is nothing less than stunning.

*Frankenstein* is one of those few performances you'll see each year that'll remain as memorable as your most vivid nightmare—minus the irritated nerves and palpitating heart. Although the play may be a mere reflection of a classic tale, *Frankenstein* is also a reminder to us all that the higher we climb in our aspirations, the harder it is to survive the fall.

## 300 nothing but eye candy

The Spartans might have nice bodies, but their mouths only articulate grunts

### 300

Directed by Zack Snyder  
Starring Gerard Butler, Leda Headey  
and Dominic West  
Empire Theatres  
Opens Friday, 9 March

ELIZABETH VAIL  
Arts & Entertainment Staff

In *300*, the new film based on the graphic novel by Frank Miller and Lynn Varley, Gerard Butler stars as Leonidas, King of Sparta, whose country is threatened by the enormous Persian army. He consults a group of sacred prophets who foretell that Sparta will fall and that Leonidas is forbidden from openly making war with Persia. But Leonidas finds a loophole: he doesn't mobilize the entire army, and instead he and 300 of his muscular friends decide to "go for a walk" that conveniently coincides with the Persians' warpath. While Leonidas and his friends are "pleasantly strolling," back in Sparta his wife struggles to convince the council to send reinforcements, but has to contend with an oily traitor (Dominic West, looking like a demonic Mark Wahlberg).

Of course, the wife subplot is a little thin, but that's because the entire plot could be written on a fortune cookie.

Let's face it, *300* is just *Marie Antoinette* for dudes—that is, a movie based on a fictional retelling of a historic event that places intense focus on the visuals while entirely neglecting narrative. To be fair, the visuals are astonishing—vast armies, walls and trees built out of human corpses, waves of gore, tits galore (both male and female)—but gratuitous. Several scenes or actions seem shoehorned in on the basis of how cool they'd look on film. The visual elements are also impeded, not helped, by flagrant overuse of slow-motion and quick-jump editing, which lends the film the look of a beautiful but meaningless music video.

For all its pomp and luxury, the visuals can't hide the fact that the movie is abominably written. The majority of the dialogue is comprised of Leonidas making a Captain Obvious victory statement ("We are Sparta!" "Never retreat, never surrender!" "Stab them with the pointy thing," etc, etc), his men whooping like ebullient frat boys, and the equally unnecessary and chest-thumping narration of injured soldier Dilios (David Menham, Boromir's younger and dumber brother in *Lord of the Rings*) that the film relies on as a crutch. The plot itself is a linear daisy-chain of the Spartans facing off against distinct sections of the Persian

army, one by one. Here come the soldiers, here come the uglier soldiers with masks, here come the olyphants (on loan from *LOTR*), here come the sorcerers with their sparkle-grenades. These foes serve less as specific obstacles and more as numbers in a cue, simply serving to add to the Spartan's body count and to stretch the movie's running time.

That's not to say that the film isn't enjoyable in its style-over-substance way. While it's little more than two hours of half-naked men hacking at each other, every spurt of blood is artistically realized (often in slow-motion), every Persian foot soldier is stunningly depicted, and every meaninglessly macho tag line is delivered with admirable enthusiasm by an amiable cast. There's lots of action and fighting and writhing topless females for the guys, 300 examples of CGI-enhanced man-candy for the girls, a suitably campy villain (*Lost*'s Rodrigo Santoro as Xerxes, a deep-voiced god-king naked but for piercings and bling-bling, whose main job is to jingle his chains and look outraged), and an unintentionally comical hunchbacked character for the viewers with more particular tastes. Ultimately, though, *300* is cinematic cotton candy—colourful and tasty, but unsatisfying and easily forgettable.

