

You'd be crazy to miss this Cuckoo

BOBBI-SUE MENARD

SPECIAL TO THE ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

Stage North has brought the classic play *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* to the North Peace Cultural Centre stage.

This large cast ensemble drama was made famous with Jack Nicholson's Oscar-winning performance on screen nearly 30 years ago. The cast of characters is similar for the play and the plot remains the very grown-up story of a group of men at a psychiatric institution when a relatively "normal" guy shows up and tries to change things.

There is a dark, grown-up humor in the play and there are plenty of laughs as well as a deeper, more disturbing message.

The play itself lays out the ground work for an interesting plot, characters are introduced slowly but surely drawing the audience into the experience. The cast does a remarkable job in its balancing act, making sure that the inmates in the institution who could so easily be overwrought and overplayed are subtle yet engrossing, with the proper chemistry between players. The casting itself is well done, playing to the strengths of many familiar faces in the Stage North Theatre Company. These fine qualities are brought out under even handed and steady direction by Dave Eaton.

The set is remarkable. It is one of the best Stage North has produced, a definite part of the show, yet so well done it is a seamless part of the background. Jen Strachan, stage manager and Coral Spelsberg, pro-

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ducer, deserve credit for the many obvious long hours put into the production values.

As for the cast, Rob Laventure is Randle McMurphy, the troublemaker who assumes he can put in time at the institution rather than the work fields of jail. He comes in ready to stir things up and run them his own way. I wasn't certain of Laventure for the first scene or two but by the end of the show he definitely owned his role and spilled out a stirring, consistent and ultimately riveting performance. Playing opposite

Laventure was June Ainsworth as Nurse Ratched, the controlling and self-righteous nurse who runs the institution with an iron fist. Ainsworth earns the ultimate compliment for an actor — she evokes an honest reaction from the audience that has them tensing in dislike of the character every time she walks on stage as the self-righteous nurse.

The ensemble cast who make up the inmates has great chemistry each playing to the particular strengths and weaknesses of their characters. All of the supporting characters who spend relatively small amounts of time on stage add to the whole and give the production interest and sparkle.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is a welcome grown-up diversion on the local entertainment scene. The themes and subject matter are thought provoking yet never stifling and the cast and crew rise to the occasion admirably.

You don't want to miss the show this final weekend with Friday and Saturday performances at 8 p.m.

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Ainsworth
earns the
ultimate
compliment
for an
actor...

Final curtain call for veteran actors

DUP

FEB 2004

RICHARD MACEDO
ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest, which opens tonight, will be the last local performance for some veteran thespians

While Tom Kirschner will take a hiatus from Stage North, June Ainsworth, is packing her bags and heading to the Lower Mainland in the summer. Both actors have been members of Stage North for 20 years.

Cuckoo's Nest premieres tonight at 8 p.m. and continues Saturday and Feb. 26-28 at the North Peace Cultural Centre.

"They've been like a second family to me, really," Kirschner said.

He won an award in Penticton last year as best actor in the province, but was involved in a motor vehicle accident shortly after returning to Fort St. John.

"It gave me a little more of a perspective of what's more important at this time in my life," he said. "And what's more important is just taking some time for me and regrouping."

Kirschner said he's keeping his hand in the entertainment world, possibly delving into comedy and art.

"I like that one-on-one with the crowd. It's a cool feeling," he said. "The arts is part of my blood, I just love it."

Ainsworth, meanwhile, will continue her strong involvement in theatre when she settles into her new home.

"A lot of the people who've been in Stage



Richard Macedo photo

Tom Kirschner will take a hiatus from the stage after Stage North's production of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.

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North for a long time are in the play," she said. "A lot of the old talent is in there.

"Actually," she noted. "Tom was in the very first production I was in."

"June's leaving, but she's never going to be too far away," said Cuckoo's Nest director Dave Eaton. "A couple of years ago, the members of Stage North board made her an honorary lifetime member.

"She has done almost everything you could imagine in theatre in those 20 years. It's impossible to list all of the different positions she's held and jobs she's

taken on in theatre."

Eaton, a virtual neophyte to the theatre scene, having been involved in Stage North since 1998, said it's been an education studying the veteran Ainsworth.

"Tom is just taking a brake from Stage North," he added. "I think he'll be back. He's doing a great job of what he's doing."

Eaton also said the play is the swan song performance for cast member Ed Chambers, who'd been with Stage North for just over a year. He's already moved to Prince George, but will return for the play.

STAGE NORTH PRESENTING

Rocky Horror Show

Northerner
Oct 20/04

DUP

North Peace Cultural Centre

Stage North will be presenting *The Rocky Horror Show* beginning on Friday.

That sweet transvestite and his motley crew are doing the Time Warp in Fort St. John. *The Rocky Horror Show* is a deliberately kitschy Rock n' Roll sci-fi gothic that is more fun than ever. The kinky cult musical with its high camp sing-a-long rituals is a delightfully lurid celebration of the lost 1950s B-movies.

There are several performances for stage-lovers beginning on Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. There are also shows Oct. 29 at 7 p.m. and midnight and Oct. 30 at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$17 for adults, \$15 for seniors and students and \$13 for children. Tickets are available at the North Peace Cultural Centre.

NPCC personal privilege passes will be honoured.

OCT 25/04 AHN

The Rocky Horror Show is daringly different

DUP

BOBBI-SUE MENARD
SPECIAL TO THE
ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

The Stage North Theatre Society has brought the campy cult classic, The Rocky Horror Picture Show, to the stage at the North Peace Cultural Centre.

If you have never seen either the live musical play or the film before you are in for a surprise. The Rocky Horror Show is guaranteed to raise some eyebrows — after all the main character, Frank, is an outer space transvestite who is busy in his castle creating monsters as his lovers.

Stumbling on Frank's castle are Brad and Janet, an innocent engaged couple who have no idea what they in for when they knock on the castle door to use the phone to call a tow truck. Brad and Janet meet all sorts of weird aliens and monsters while they are forced to spend the night in Frank's castle.

Friday was opening night for the run at the Cultural Centre. The show started out with a tentative feel from the cast as they took the big step of appearing on stage in corsets and fishnet tights. It didn't help that initially the volume on the microphones of the main characters was a little low leaving the audience straining to make out the words of the songs.

It took the singing of the famous song "Time Warp" for the production to really start grooving along, the high camp and melodrama was backed up by the volume and energy of the chorus, and the actors on stage seemed to take a big relaxing breath and settle into their roles.

Darren Szpak plays Frank, the hedonistic transvestite, who runs his castle like a small sexual dictatorship. Szpak filled the role of Frank with a large presence and he sang really well keeping his voice right through to the end of they play, given the amount of singing he had to do that is very impressive. Gilles Francoeur plays Brad, opposite Pam Mounsey as Janet. The pair play off of each other well, especially in the beginning, when their characters set up the entire play by providing a contrast of their conservative values against the fast and loose Frank.

Jenn Gretzinger and Stephanie Pound are Frank's assistants. Pound has a dynamic vibrant feel for her role and Gretzinger is solid as Columbia. Blair Scott brings his huge energy and welcome bravura antics in the role of Riff Raff, the butler, and then there is the brave, brave Neil Praud as Rocky. Rocky is Frank's latest experiment, and Praud gamely tackles the tough role.

While the cast worked hard their energy seemed to drop towards the end of the show; perhaps the physical demands of the performance taking a toll. While the stage itself has obvious benefits in design, I was hoping for a little more visual zip. The costumes aren't quite as daring as London stagings of the play, but the corsets, feather boas, and high heeled pumps on the guys all make a lasting impression.

I really enjoyed this show on a lot of levels. It is so ambitious for co-directors Jen Strachan and Teela Gould to bring it to the live stage in Fort St John.

Though I must admit to the small "C" Conservative in me cringing during the kissing scenes between the male characters. Somehow it is so much more shocking "live" than on film.

One of the big features of The Rocky Horror show is audience participation and there wasn't very much on the night I attended. The directors are hoping that they will have a large turnout of people in drag costume at the midnight show on Friday. Audience participation would add another dimension and be so much fun when people stood up in their seats to do the Time Warp.

If you are looking for a daringly different night out then The Rocky Horror show is for you.