

Heaven Sent

Angels in America earns its wings

When you walk into the Metro this month, you are going to see something that is rarely attempted in theatre anywhere, let alone Victoria. I'll tell you why in a minute. For now just know you have a chance to see something really special with Where's Noonan's production of Tony Kushner's *Angels In America*.

It's New York in the mid '80s. Reagan is at the height of his power. Various religions have a good chokehold on the populace. Homosexuality is still taboo, and AIDS is quickly growing to pandemic proportions.

Struggling through this harsh political and social climate are Prior Walter, a young gay man just diagnosed with AIDS; his lover Louis, who is terrified of illness; the curmudgeonly but very powerful Republican lawyer Roy; and his young protégée Joe, the Mormon whose struggle with his blasphemous closet homosexuality drives his fragile wife Harper closer to her Valium and further away from reality. They all are people driven by fear and trying desperately to understand their world and find a way to feel safe.

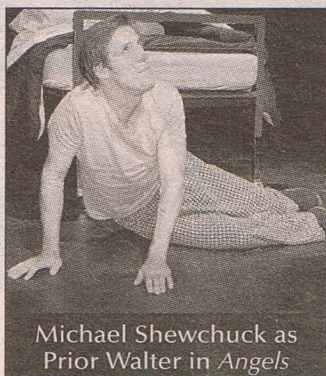
It's a complicated, inspiring, and incredibly crafted story. It's also close to six hours long. What goes into rehearsing a production of this size I can't imagine, but please don't let that scare you off; Where's Noonan is presenting it in two reasonably sized parts performed on different days.

The entire cast does a fantastic job keeping the energy up in each half of the play. The story never falters or stalls. Special kudos are needed for Michael Shewchuck's heartbreaking performance as Prior, a man struggling with a deadly disease while mourning the betrayal of his lover. Jan Sickler and her variety of small charming characters also deserves a nod.

It's hard to connect with your audience for three-hour stretches. Director David MacPherson has done an admirable job keeping the story alive and his actors on their game. He makes excellent use of the entire stage, often having two or even three scenes set up at the same time. The action is intermixed, cutting from one section of the stage to another, helping the different stories intertwine as they unfold.

MacPherson does, however, make some questionable staging choices that distract from the play. Many scenes, especially those that involve people in sickbeds, are blocked so one actor has his back to the audience. This choice hurts the actors as they are harder to hear and we miss out on the actual interaction between characters. And while the dimly lit stage does help set the dark mood of the story, it also keeps many of the actors' faces in shadows, so even when they are facing you, you still can't see them talking.

Despite the few staging issues, *Angels* is an impressive, if challenging, play. Not only is it demanding of its cast and crew, it expects a lot of its audience as well. You are asked to sit through three hours of hard-hitting subject matter. And then you are asked to come back another night and do it again. But it's worth it—*Angels* is a powerful story, and we're lucky to have the opportunity to see such an epic production right here in our home town.



Michael Shewchuck as Prior Walter in *Angels*

Angels in America

To October 21

Metro Studio, 1411 Quadra

Tickets \$20 per show, \$30

for both performances

995-8792