

Employment



BCPolls.com



'Prodigal Son' finds state of grace

By Michael V. Smith
Mar 23 2006

Taboos of sexuality and religion tackled with skill by Vancouver playwright

In Prodigal Son, his first full-length play, Vancouver playwright Shawn Macdonald tackles the three taboos of dinner-table



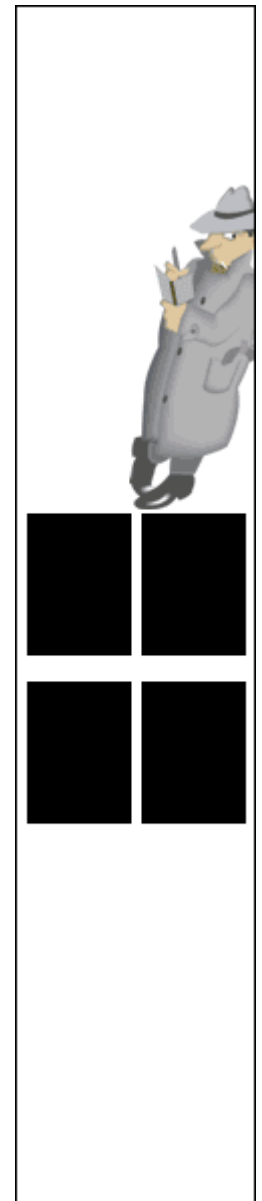
Craig Erickson as a young man coming out to his family in 1970s Quebec, and Christine Willes as his emotionally fragile mother, in Prodigal Son.

conversation: religion, politics, and sex. Here he gives us Peter (Craig Erickson), a gay man in 1970s Quebec who rejected God at a young age but now struggles to understand his recent experiences of spiritual ecstasy.

When Peter begins to feel the same oneness with the world that he had experienced as a boy, his boyfriend and fellow atheist, Barclay (Bob Frazer), sends him to therapy. "My boyfriend thinks I'm crazy," Peter tells his new counsellor, Carol (Gina Chiarelli), as she invites him to examine his devout Catholic upbringing. Through flashbacks, we are shown the young Peter as he hears the voice of God speak his name, feels God in nature, and writes poetic prayers to God. Yet while we hear more references to God in Prodigal Son than at Sunday mass, the adult Peter would rather not hear God's name at all.

Peter's rejuvenated moments of rapture coincide with his father's failing health. As the era's English-French referendum is being decided, Peter returns home to Quebec from Burnaby, less than ecstatic about coming out of the closet as a means of finding peace with his father. He arrives to what will seem, to many in the audience, like a familiar death-bed scene.

If these scenarios seem well-worn, Macdonald has added a fresh



Ads by Goooooogle

[Wear the Joy of Jesus](#)

Finally, Jesus confirmed as joy. Pictures of Jesus on Christian gift www.joyfuljesus.com

[Biblical Unitarians](#)

Dedicated to fighting for truth. One God & One Lord not the Trinity <http://www.biblicalunitaria>

[Believe in God?](#)

We'll pay you \$75 right now to complete a simple survey! PaidSurveysOnline.com

[Learn Voodoo Powers](#)

Voodoo is Real. The power can be yours to control all others. www.voodoo.scienceofm

addition with Peter's pantheistic moments of ecstasy. In flashback, young Peter's spiritual candour is affecting, and Macdonald gives a welcome discussion regarding whether faith and/or God are found through the Church, and if God can't be celebrated privately, individually, without dogma.

Although the dialogue is so bare at times that you shiver (Peter says to his counsellor, "God is stupid- He bugs me, he hates me"), thankfully, those moments are side by side with the funniest of lines, such as during a tiff over Peter's depression, when Barclay quips, "There's a reason we're called gay and not dull-assed." And Frazer's coquettish, inventive use of a martini on first meeting Peter proves he can 'do gay' with the best of them.

As Peter, Erickson does a solid job with a tricky part - ecstatic union with the universe can't be easy to perform. Alex Pimm, Michael Gunion and Camille Beaudoin, who play Peter and his siblings in childhood, are excellent.

Gina Chiarelli is a wonderful mess, both as counsellor and adult sister. Meanwhile, Christine Willes settles into Peter's mother, much aged, in the second act; her breakdown, in which she devolves from her usual prudery to cursing "fuck," is as hysterical as it is moving. Sadly, as the father, Donald Adams seems as false as the wig he wears in the first act, all wood and no flesh.

The Pacific Theatre is a challenging space, with actors having to play to an audience on either side of them. Director Katrina Dunn masters it, using the physical space to mirror the spiritual divide between Peter's past and present.

Plays about spirituality might not be everyone's cup of tea, but have faith. If Prodigal Son is any indication, Shawn Macdonald has great things brewing. ?



© Copyright 2006 WestEnder

Advertise on this site

Contest

[Lucky Number Slevin](#)
[Movie Pass](#)
[Kwantlen Grad Fashion Show](#)

Listings

[Send in your listings](#)

Home Showcase Review

[Home Pages
Real Estate Listings](#)

WestEnder

[Classifieds](#)

Contributors

[Cat's Eye](#)

Information

[City of Vancouver](#)
[BC Government](#)
[Parks and Rec](#)
[Translink](#)