



Photo by Maria Corvallis

Johanna Schmitz (right) as Snowball and Lee Krahenbuhl as Napoleon gave good performances in the University's musical production of "Animal Farm."

## Script weak in some spots, but 'Animal Farm' succeeds

OK, "Animal Farm" as a musical. Somehow it is hard to picture George Orwell's 1945 allegory on the Russian Revolution as song-and-dance material, but there it was, in front of a very responsive, near sellout crowd at the Robinson Theatre. Pigs, horses, cows, sheep and a cat — singing, dancing and waving their paws.

Review by  
Marty Schwarzbauer

Adapted from Orwell's novel by Sir Peter Hall, director of the British Theatre, this University production of "Animal Farm" came off pretty well. There were some weak spots, particularly in the script itself, but overall the performance was quite successful.

The show opened with Al Villanueva's soft piano accompaniment, followed by Jason Buell, as The Boy, strutting out in knickers, narrating the story from an oversized book. Both Buell and Stan Freitag as Farmer Jones started out a little too hyper and maybe somewhat silly, but soon settled into a nice high-energy tempo.

The quick pace was maintained throughout most of the show, but seemed to drag a little toward the end. This may be attributed to the fact that the cast of "Animal Farm" is probably one of the youngest, least experienced to star in the Robinson. Almost everyone involved carried it off pretty well, though.

With the actors all in masks and constantly changing from one animal to another (sometimes in mid-scene, right on stage), it was occasionally hard to keep up with who was playing what. A few performances really stood out, though, particularly Lee Krahenbuhl as Napoleon the pig, and Freitag in multiple roles as Farmer Jones, Moses the Raven and one of the dogs. Freitag did some nice off-focus acting as one of the dogs, chewing and scratching at fleas, and sniffing around at other characters.

Maintaining character believability when the focus is elsewhere on stage can be one of the more difficult challenges for Oregon Daily Emerald

any actor. Chad McCord's roles, especially his hen and cow, and Karen Read's sensual portrayal of the cat were notably impressive.

Read's preening, cleaning and tail-chasing, and her frequent obliviousness to the seriousness of the action were so catlike, one could almost hear her purring. Director Gray Eubank has to be complimented for his actors' successes in this regard.

Other strong performances included Brad Mead's role as Boxer, the mindlessly obeisant workhorse, and Johanna Schmitz as Snowball the pig. I had a little problem when Snowball was chased off the farm by the other animals and Schmitz returned as an almost identical young pig. I suppose it would be too easy to say that since Snowball supposedly represented Leon Trotsky in the story, Schmitz's return as another pig represented a Trotsky-esque element among young communists.

All the performances were more than adequate, although sometimes Cole-Arthur Hornaday as Squealer the pig was a bit forced in his exuberance. There was also a frequent tendency toward silliness by many of the actors, which distracted from the story.

Other than that, the only really weak element, however was in the script itself, which, while attempting to remain true to Orwell, was a little shaky toward the end. This, combined with some opening night jitters

and the lack of experience among most of the cast, probably caused the breakdown in tempo late in the play.

David Apple's set, with its quickly changing parts and odd-angle design, was wonderful, almost psychedelic. Nancy Julian's simple costuming was effective in that it gave the illusion of the particular animals without dominating the focus.

Eubanks says he directed this production with "an essence of the way a child looks at the world," and he has successfully come up with a show that will appeal not only to kids, but to the child in everyone.

"Animal Farm" continues at the Robinson Theatre Thursday, Friday and Saturday, November 13-15, and Friday and Saturday, November 21 and 22.



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