

often brutal glimpse at what is truly taking place behind artificial exteriors.

Albee describes *The American Dream* as "a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, emasculation and vacuity; it is a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen."

Billed as a comedy, *Dream's* subject matter is far from hilarious, approaching intensely serious themes through unconventional form—but often using humor as its basis. "The play's horror is only reported or implied," *The New Yorker* described after the premiere, "and it is further pointed up by being juxtaposed with an unfailing and wholly original comic inventiveness that is by turns ridiculous, satiric, sardonic and sensibly surrealistic."

The Zoo Story and *The American Dream* are especially poignant post-Sept. 11. Unger, who is directing the play, asks: "How are we as a people dealing with this new reality? Are we choosing to sweep these new and critical issues under the carpet in order to perpetuate a 'peachy-keen' fiction, as Albee calls it? What are the consequences of forcing the truth?" Audiences will be asked to take a close look at both the works' critical questions.

Winner of the 1975 Pulitzer Prize, *Seascape* examines evolution and the significance of life when two couples—one human and one reptilian—encounter each other on the beach. The human couple are discussing their long-standing relationship and conflicting desires for the future when they are joined by two talking reptiles from the sea. Suddenly, their perspective on life flips upside down.

"Albee's emotional landscape is one of

yearning, frustration and loneliness transcended by love," Oregon critic Bob Hicks said in 1980. "He is fascinated by the nature of marriage and apparently sees it as a magnificently creative alliance against death—one that blunts individuality but is well worth the cost."

This play is not just a fantastic opportunity for costume design; it's absurdly funny, and the dialogue is almost musical, in true Albee form. However, *Seascape* does not avoid approaching harsh human realities—also in true Albee form.

Three Tall Women has won the Pulitzer Prize, Drama Critic's Circle Award and Outer Critics Circle Award. A wealthy matriarch (loosely based on Albee's own mother, of course!) is nearing death and looking back over her turbulent past. Two other women attend her. Are they relatives? Are they friends? Or are they versions of herself, coming to terms with who they are and what they are destined to become? Never one to pick a light topic, the playwright addresses issues of aging, dementia and death in this 1994 work. "Albee's relationship with his mother will probably be thesis and dissertation fodder for decades if not centuries," Baltimore critic Howard Gradet said, "but Albee himself has turned that difficult reality into the pure gold of artistic greatness." **JM**

PROFILE THEATRE PROJECT stages *The Zoo Story* as well as *The American Dream* Oct. 11 to Nov. 17 at Theater! Theatre!, 3430 S.E. Belmont St. A "mat chat" with the director and cast follows the Oct. 20 performance. Tickets are \$12-\$25 from 503-242-0080.

SARAH LEIMERT is the Editorial Assistant at Just Out.

A hard day's Night

Solid portrayal of Tennessee Williams' last gasp

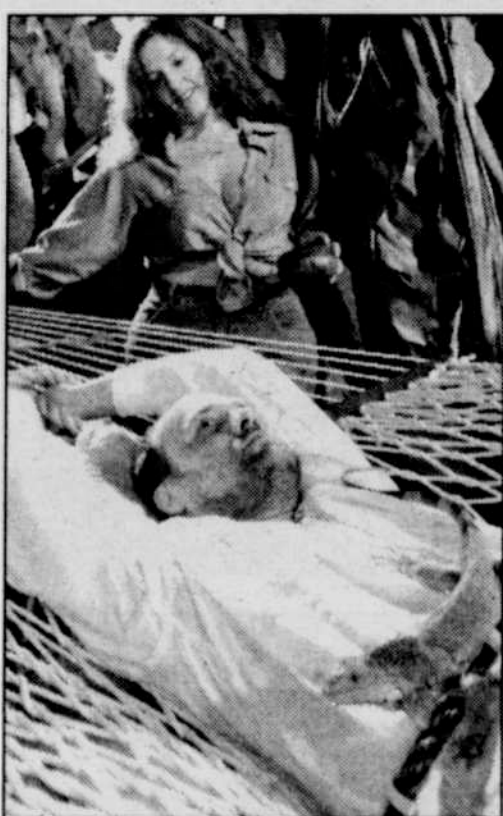
BY MARC ACITO

Tennessee Williams' final major work, *The Night of the Iguana*, receives a solid and faithful interpretation at Artists Repertory Theatre, now playing through Oct. 20.

It's the tale of lapsed clergyman turned tour guide T. Lawrence Shannon and his desperate attempt to regain control of his sanity. Like most of Williams' works, it takes place in a humid setting—this time the west coast of Mexico—but the scale is not as steamy or erotic as works like *A Streetcar Named Desire* or *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Indeed, *Iguana* plays more like a chamber work compared to the near-operatic scope of his other masterpieces.

True to the play, Brenda Hubbard's able direction does not impose anything extraneous on what is largely a wordy and often philosophical debate. Her attention seems focused on unobtrusively clearing a space to showcase the cast's fine acting and Williams' gorgeous words. While her decision to remain faithful to the work's rhythm and pace is admirable, audiences should definitely avail themselves of the baked goods in the lobby to fortify themselves for the more than three-hour running time.

The four principal actors are notably con-



vincing and compelling, bringing multiple emotional layers to their portrayals—none more so than Tim True, whose performance as Shannon is dynamic and frighteningly real. The supporting cast works at a consistently high level, as well.

For gay theatergoers much of the appeal will come from viewing the play autobiographically. Soon after *Iguana*, Williams descended into what he referred to as his "stoned age." For the remaining 20 years of his life, drugs and alcohol so severely diminished his powers, he only produced works that were, at best, needlessly coarse and, at worst, utterly

incomprehensible.

In the character of Shannon one sees the harrowing personal struggle of one of the greatest gay scribes of the past century. "My mind is going out like a failing power," he says, his cry for help clearly also the playwright's.

Like his character, Williams made it his mission to conduct tours of horrifying landscapes for middle-class audiences. Unfortunately for him, he never returned after this final trip. **JM**

ARTISTS REPERTORY THEATRE, 1516 S.W. Alder St., stages *The Night of the Iguana* through Oct. 20. Tickets are \$15-\$30 from 503-241-1278.

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