

EQUUS

OPUS Performing Arts Community

Noarlunga College Theatre

Until May 28

Review by Simon Slade

Feigning an orgasm astride a horse. Miming self-flagellation. Full frontal nudity. A production of Peter Shaffer's "Equus" can easily go so wrong. Instead, OPUS presents a mature performance of a difficult script.

Peter Shaffer's Tony Award winning play "Equus" was inspired by a BBC report of a British boy who inexplicably blinded twenty-six horses in a stable. The story fascinated Shaffer, provoking him "to interpret it in some entirely personal way." His dramatic goal, he wrote in a note to the play, was "to create a mental world in which the deed could be made comprehensible." The result is a riveting journey into the world of insanity told through the eyes of a self-doubting psychiatrist.

Harry Dewar, as Dr. Dysart, portrays the troubled doctor powerfully with bursts of rage and painful emotions. He delivers Dysart's monologues with conviction and he cleverly manoeuvres Alan with his 'tricks,' although he could turn up the intensity in two or three places so that he would have a fuller connection with the other actors on stage.

Nathan Lambert, as Alan, carried the troubled boy with enough mystery to deliver his pain in a well timed performance that saw Alan emerge from uncooperative to acquiesce as he vividly relieves his world of sexual and religious fantasies. Lambert completely immerses himself in Alan's fantasy, in a performance that skilfully balances the power and vulnerability of the boy.

As Alan's favourite horse, Nugget, Grant Hull nails the physicality: the backside arched out, the legs taut, and the halting, pompous steps. He even gets the heavy sound of exhaling breath right. It's the kind of performance that only works if the actor goes all the way with it.

The other actors do a good job of supporting the main roles, and Carly Whittaker, as Jill Mason, is excellent as the young stable hand who tries to seduce Alan.

The design of the stage and the fact that the audience is on two sides creates the impression that the audience is actually inside the psychiatrist's office with the patient

As Directors, Harry Dewar and Paul Kaesler have taken up the challenge of this often mis-directed show and done a fine job. All the more difficult when they are both in the show too!

For those of you who thought that challenging theatre stopped within a five-kilometre radius of the GPO – the truth is out there.