



The Lion in Winter

James Goldman's community-theater chestnut, set at a French castle around Christmas in 1183, depicts England's royals as a squabbling, wisecrack-prone dysfunctional family, each of whose members is constantly jockeying for the crown. Aging King Henry II would like to secure his legacy, but his queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine—imprisoned for supporting an earlier revolt against him—wants to destroy him for the sport of it. Each of their three sons, meanwhile, is willing to scheme, double-cross and, if necessary, kill his way to the throne. "Well," as Eleanor says, "what family doesn't have its ups and downs?"



Idle Muse Theatre Company (see Fringe & storefront). By James Goldman. Dir. Evan Jackson. With Dave Skvarla, Elizabeth MacDougald. 2hrs 30mins; one intermission.

Most of the play's scenes unfold in identical fashion: One or more characters plot something, other characters find out, vicious bickering ensues. Soon, the law of diminishing returns goes into effect and the arguments start to feel repetitive, the writing relentlessly quippy. Evan Jackson's staging doesn't entirely surmount these obstacles, but at

least he keeps things enjoyably light and snappy. Dennis Mae's set design, incorporating sliding tapestries and stained-glass windows, imparts a sense of movement and provides ample hiding places—and makes the side project's postage stamp-size space feel much bigger than it is.

As the feuding Plantagenets, the cast conveys the appropriate zest for blood sport—except, perhaps, Elizabeth MacDougald, whose Eleanor is wooden until after intermission, when the actor seems to think she's playing Medea. She has the play's best part, but this time King Henry steals the show, thanks to the savage glee and shameless lechery Dave Skvarla brings to the role. —Zac Thompson

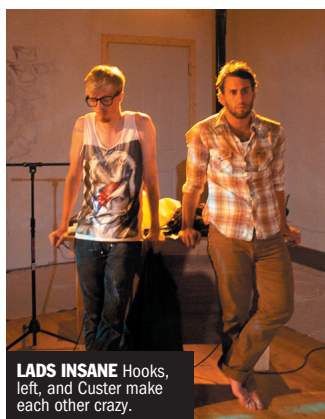
One Night Only



Abraham Werewolf (see Fringe & storefront). By Ian Paul Custer and Matthew Hooks. Dir. Jay O'Berski. With Custer, Hooks, Kasey O'Brien. 1hr; no intermission.

The program for *One Night Only*, about the volatile reunion between an estranged actor and director, names the sources that the cast and director Jay O'Berski drew from to create the piece. The list ranges from *The Notebook* to Charles Bukowski. Yet the various inspirations never become a cohesive unit; a lot of shit is thrown at the stage, but not much sticks.

The three-person cast confidently tackles the arduous material, but the show's concept fails to captivate. The messy structure does nothing to



further the core love-triangle plot, combining rehashed scenes from Ryan Gosling movies (*Blue Valentine* is the other big one) with Hall & Oates

sing-alongs, experimental movement sequences and a bizarre Butoh detour halfway through. The Gosling scenes, taken out of context, are divested of their emotional power, and the general lack of focus causes the production to feel much longer than the hour it runs.

Sierra Dufault's live painting on the set's walls is the only place where the play's multiple threads form a unified artistic statement. Dufault's impressive collage becomes a sanctuary as the piece progresses, particularly during the lengthy musical interludes, and the artist herself has a part in the play's most affecting scene. Stripped of any musical or cultural reference, Kasey O'Brien and Dufault share a simple, casual conversation, finding the honesty that the rest of the production lacks. —Oliver Sava

Family Devotions



Halcyon Theatre (see Fringe & storefront). By David Henry Hwang. Dir. Jenn Adams. With ensemble cast. 1hr 15mins; no intermission.

David Henry Hwang's tricky, cynical comedy, which debuted at New York's Public Theater when the writer was just 24 years old, takes on Asian-American assimilationism in the early '80s. We're introduced to a Southern California family of first- and second-generation Chinese immigrants in which the Americanized women do aerobics to Olivia Newton-John and the men one-up each other over their collections of tax shelters. Jenny (Katelyn Foley), the youngest daughter, pores over *Vogue* and wants to become a dancer, while her cousin Chester (Jin Kim)—who those who saw Hwang's more recent *Yellow Face* may infer is an authorial stand-in—is off to play violin for the Boston Symphony.

Watching over all are constantly disapproving elders Popo (Kaori Aoshima) and Ama (Mia Park). Both keepers of the Chinese cultural flame and devoutly Christian—having been converted by a missionary family member who's spoken of with the greatest reverence—the sisters eagerly await a visit from their long-lost brother Di-Gou (Arvin Jalandoon), who stayed behind in China when the rest of the family departed for the Philippines. When Di-Gou arrives, he upends everyone's expectations.

Though some moments land with precision, overall Hwang's delicate balance of biting satire and goofy farce eludes Halcyon's production. Jenn Adams's staging has too little room to breathe in the cramped confines of the Greenhouse's downstairs studio space; Tony Adams's scenic design creates blocking and sightline issues even as it does little to suggest a nouveau-riche Bel Air sunroom. With the cast tilting overblown from the start, Hwang's heightened climax loses its power. —Kris Vire

