

## Review

February 2, 2008

# Rep Theatre takes a good risk with Albee's 'The Goat'

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For The Tennessean

Edward Albee's *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?* is a difficult, risky and flawed play on many levels, but Tennessee Rep should be commended for bringing it to Nashville audiences.

Albee, well known for provocative plays such as *The Zoo Story*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *Seascape* and *Three Tall Women*, probes the life of the individual against the backdrop of American societal norms.

In *The Goat*, Albee takes one of society's odder verbotens — a man's great love for a goat — and uses it not as a punch line, but as a metaphor to examine the issues of love, lust, loneliness and loss.

In full disclosure, I saw *The Goat* on Broadway in 2002, and I left that production thinking Albee had let the metaphor devour the play, thereby diluting its central theme. That said, it's a fascinating, compelling and thought-provoking play.

## A slower pace

The Rep's production is noticeably different in tone from the one I saw in New York. Whereas the Broadway version mined the script for every possible nugget of humor, director René Copeland has staged it with more realism and less satire. The pace seems slower than it needs to be, adding a gravitas that the script can't quite sustain. Consequently, the audience laughter tends to be more uncomfortable than boisterous.

*The Goat* is not an easy play to stage. At 100 minutes with no intermission, it requires seasoned, nuanced performances to succeed. Matthew Carlton in the lead role of Martin succeeds well and presents an honest, vulnerable portrayal of a man on the edge, lost and alone. Ruth Cordell gives a competent but unvaried performance as wife Stevie. Henry Haggard and Andy Kanies deliver well as the friend and son of Martin.

Gary Hoff's set is pleasant and serviceable, designed to accommodate the smashing of many a vase in a crash-box sort of way. Phillip Franck's lighting design, which makes logical sense (light through windowpanes), is unfortunately distracting as actors are caught in "windowpane" dark shafts.

Although it won the Tony Award for Best Play in 2002, *The Goat* is not for everyone. The Rep is not allowing anyone under 18 to attend, even with a parent. That policy may be overkill in this online age. Yes, the profanity is explicit, but it's also dramatically necessary, not gratuitous.

Overall, *The Goat* is a great effort by The Rep.