

# GOAT

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as individuals and as a society. As the joke goes, "old" is 15 years older than whatever age you happen to be. In the same vein, is "unnatural" or "kinky" just one or two sex acts beyond which you're personally willing to engage in?

Years ago, divorce was considered scandalous and homosexuality was called "the love that dare not speak its name." Now both are commonplace. And "The Scarlet Letter" couldn't be set in modern times because we'd run out of A's.

"It's a play about how people think they may be tolerant, but maybe they really aren't," says Dallas Dunnagan, Artistic Director of the Naples Players, who perform the play. "Where does tolerance really end? He had to pick something that would test the characters but would also test the audience. Are you really willing to sit there and consider this act?"

"He wanted something that we don't read about daily. I don't know if he picked [bestiality] to be offensive, I can't speak for the playwright. He wanted to go somewhere where the subject matter was taboo, and in this day and age, there's not very much that's taboo."

Yet while the cast was rehearsing, there was a story in the paper about a man and an animal, she says.

In the play, "it's a metaphor for any act that anybody doesn't conceive of anybody else doing," she says.

Albee, known for previous plays such as "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" "The Zoo Story" and "Three Tall Women," is a three-time Pulitzer prize-winner and recipient of three Tony Awards.

"The Goat," which opened on Broadway in 2002, received a Tony Award

for Best Play, a New York Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Play, was voted Best Play of 2002 by the New York Drama Critics Circle, and was a finalist for the 2003 Pulitzer Prize in Drama. Initial reviews were mixed, and some people walked out.

"It's kind of thrilling when that happens (and in the United States it's usually with older, white couples) but we authors do not intentionally provoke it," Albee writes in "About the Goat" in his collection of essays, "Stretching My

Mind." "We desire to engage, to upset, to trouble, but we want people to stay around till the end — to see if they were right in wanting to leave."

"...You may, of course, have received the misleading information that the play is about bestiality — more con than pro. Well, bestiality is *discussed* during the play (as is flower arranging) but it is a generative matter rather than the 'subject.' The play is about love, and loss, the

limits of our tolerance and who, indeed, we really are."

Is Martin reprehensible because he's cheating on his wife? Because "the other woman" is a goat? Because he pretends to be supportive of his gay teenage son but hurls a hurtful epithet in the heat of an argument? Where is the line between love and sex, and what happens when we cross over it?

Albee subtitled his play "Notes Towards a Definition of Tragedy."

"It's an Everyman story," Dunnagan

"Albee is an extremely clever playwright. There are all sorts of allusions to Greek tragedies; they talk about the Furies early in the play. It's a modern tragic story."

However, Dunnagan says, the play is very funny, and describes it as "just very cleverly written, one of those plays where while you're laughing, you gasp, because you can't believe you're laughing at it. It's an amazing play that way — how funny it is in all the horror of it, all the horrific emotion."

The theater warns audiences that "this provocative, award-winning show is appropriate only for a mature audience" and that "some may find the harsh language and adult theme offensive." Theater-goers should decide for themselves whether they want to see it or not.

Previous shows in the theater's black box haven't shied away from other difficult topics, such as incest, homophobia, murder, and death.

"That's always been the purpose of the black box," Dunnagan says. "It's a good thing. It stretches not only our audiences, but our actors, and the people who work on the shows. A lot of good conversation and debate comes out of doing stuff like this. It's very healthy."

"There's a group of people that really wants to see theater that stretches them, informs them. I had a subscriber call me and say, 'Thank you for letting me know what it's about. We don't think we'll see it, but we're glad you're doing this type of theater.'

"Theater is there to educate and inform and to stretch us and teach us things we don't know, and to allow us to grow emotionally and intellectually. That's what it's all about."

"The Goat' is one of those shows that you either love it or hate it. But whether you love it or hate it, you're gonna think about it, it's going to stay with you." ■

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