

OBERLIN Theater Performance News

Oberlin College • Hall Auditorium • 67 North Main Street • Oberlin OH 44074-1191 • Phone (440) 775-8171 • Fax (440) 775-8050

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For Immediate Release

Repertory Theater Week:

Equus

- 8 pm, Wednesday and Friday, February 7 & 9
- 2 pm matinee on Saturday, February 10, with a post show talk

Venus

- 8 pm, Thursday and Saturday, February 8 & 10
- 2 pm matinee on Sunday, February 11

All performances are in Hall Auditorium.

Hall is located at 67 N. Main St. (Route 58) in Oberlin between the Allen Art Museum and the Oberlin Inn.

General admission tickets:

- \$4 OC Students
- \$6 Senior Citizens
- Oberlin College Staff and Alumni
- \$8 Public

Central Ticket Service 24-hour ticket reservation line: (440) 775-8169.

CTS is located in the lobby of Hall Auditorium.

Open 12 to 5 pm,
Monday – Friday

Special Saturday Hours:
12 to 5pm, Feb. 3 and 10

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REPERTORY THEATER WEEK AT OBERLIN COLLEGE HIGHLIGHTS THE DISTURBING WITH PERFORMANCES OF *EQUUS* AND *VENUS*, FEB. 7-11

Equus – Performances at 8 pm, Wednesday and Friday, Feb. 7 & 9
2 pm matinee with a post show talk on Saturday, February 10

Venus – Performances at 8 pm, Thursday and Saturday, Feb. 8 & 10
2 pm matinee on Sunday, February 11

Photos and complimentary media tickets available: (440) 775-8171

OBERLIN, OH—Questions about individual passion and compassion will be raised during Oberlin College's Repertory Theater Week performances through the psychological demise and sexual experimentation of a young boy in Paul Shaffer's *Equus*, and by the exploitation of a shapely woman in Suzan-Lori Parks *Venus*. Repertory Theater Week is February 7 to 11. These two productions are for mature audiences.

Equus, by Peter Shaffer

8 pm, Wednesday and Friday, February 7 & 9,
2 pm matinee with a post show talk on Saturday, February 10

In *Equus*, directed by Rob Ross, '01, Honors Candidate in Theater, Psychiatrist Martin Dysart's patient, seventeen year old Alan Strang, has hideously blinded five horses with a hoof pick. T.H. McCulloh of the *Los Angeles Times* writes, "Once, when told his works seemed like musical compositions, playwright Peter Shaffer explained that he had started out as a composer. That background is particularly evident in "Equus," his powerful commentary on passion and sanity... It rings with melody, counterpoint and a lush compassion for the human spirit."

The mystery of Alan's motivations is complex. To the owner of the horses, the incident was the unlucky result of employing someone young and unstable. But as Dysart uncovers the circumstances of Alan's family – his atheist, socialist, totalitarian father and devoutly religious yet lenient mother – his actions are no more extreme than the diametric opposites in which his parents continually pull him. Both of his parent's personalities lack passion, so he turns to the picture of a horse, which replaced that of Christ in chains, to worship. But when his god, "Equus," begins an omnipresent watchfulness, Alan realizes he can never escape from God's eyes.

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To Dysart, Alan's worship and sexual fascination with "Equus" is a form of passion that is both stunning and disturbing. Because it is so untainted by society's attempts for conformity, the psychiatrist is in admiration of his young patient. It is an admiration, however, that eventually leads to his own destruction. According to director Ross, this Tony award-winning modern day Greek tragedy "questions whether there is a place for individuality, passion, and worship. The answer, however, is as confounding as the question itself and, by night's end, rests solely in the possession of the exiting audience members, as they pass the "cured" body of Alan Strang." The *Equus* production is for mature audiences.

Equus is performed by Oberlin students Aaron Bonner-Jackson, '01 (Harry Dalton); Richard Braithwaite, '03 (Horse); Hallie Gnatovich, '04 (Jill Mason); Taylor Greeson, '03 (Horse); Ann Johnson, '04 (Dora Strang); Channing Joseph, '03 (Horse); Bacilio Mendez, '04 (Horseman/Nugget); Aaron Mucciolo, '02 (Horse); Daniel Neuman, '03 (Alan Strang); Peter O'Leary, '02, (Frank Strang); Mary Ross, '04 (Nurse); Laura Shepherd, '01 (Hester Salomon); and Tom Taylor, '04 (Martin Dysart).

The production staff includes managing director Michael Grube, associate professor of theater; costume designer Chris Flaharty, associate professor of theater; sound designer Jen Groseth, lecturer in theater; technical director Rick Mayfield, lecturer in theater; lighting designer Carolyn Wong, '01; set designer Sarah Bendix, '02; stage manager Meg Morley, '03; assistant stage managers Dan Carmichael, '01 and Asher Rapkin, '04.

Playwright and director

Peter Shaffer (Playwright) has written a number of plays for stage and screen, including *The Salt Land*, his first play which was presented on BBC; *Five Finger Exercises* (1958), which won the Evening Standard Drama Award and the Drama Critics Award; *Equus*, which won the 1975 Tony Award for Best Play, as well as the New York Drama Critics Circle Award; and *Amadeus* (1984), which won eight Academy Awards including "Best Picture." Shaffer's cannon includes a unique mix of philosophical dramas and satirical comedies, and continues to expand. His most recent work was the stage play *The Gift of the Gorgon*, which was produced in London in 1992., the same year in which he won the William Inge Award for Distinguished Achievement in the American Theater. Shaffer is from Liverpool, England.

Rob Ross (Director) is a senior English major with a concentration in Theater from Oakland, CA. Oberlin credits include *Lucia Mad* (Assistant Technical Director); and *Life Under Water* (Director). He was a directing intern at the Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts. Ross is directing *Equus* for his Senior Honors Project.

Venus, by Suzan-Lori Parks

8 pm Thursday and Saturday, February 8 & 10,

2 pm matinee on Sunday, February 11

Venus is directed by Shannon Forney, '01, Honors Candidate in Interdisciplinary Performance. Set in "exotic" London in 1810, this is the true story of the Venus Hottentot, a young African woman exploited for her body; first in a freak show, and later by the doctor who buys her body for science, lusts for her and ultimately destroys her. The *Venus* production is for mature audiences.

Lured away from her menial job with hopes of traveling and wealth, Sarah Baartman (the Venus Hottentot) finds herself in England where she is sold to a side show and displayed as a "freak." Her "freedom" is bought by a Parisian doctor for scientific study. His curiosity turns to lust and the Venus becomes his mistress. He provides for her until he is in danger of losing his medical reputation and social standing. When he dissects her body to regain his status, their love and her life are ended.

The Venus Hottentot is found in history as Sarah Baartman, of the Khoi Khoi people in South Africa. At the time of the Dutch Boer Wars, she was brought to England and displayed in a freak show for her race as well as for her physical characteristics. Her voluptuous figure gave rise to the sexual tension surrounding her in Victorian England. She was "adopted" by Doctor George Culvier, and their extended love affair ended in her death. Her body was dissected and displayed in the Musee de L'Homme in Paris until 1974. There is now much debate as to whether or not to send her body back to Africa.

According to director Forney, "*Venus* is not just the life story of Sarah Baartman, but rather the experience of viewing and spectatorship that Baartman endured throughout her life. It reminds us all of the danger of display and calls upon us to examine the exoticization of Cultural Otherness" The audience is situated within a freak show that dominates both the play and the theater simultaneously. These side show performances resurrect Venus' life and call to attention the horrible consequences of her death, by recreating the spectacle once again, finally ending in a funeral march for Sarah Baartman. With a heavy use of puppetry and spectacle, *Venus* is complete with fire tricks, stiltwalkers, and puppet faces, treading the line between play and display as a social and political performance piece.

As reviewed by The New Yorker, "*Venus* is a formidable experience: a gnarly but brilliant meditation on the ambiguity of race, history, the colonized imagination, sexuality, and theatrical storytelling itself."

Venus is performed by Oberlin students Joanna Burch-Brown, '03 (Stilt Gal); Jeremy Carlson, '03 (Penis Man); Arielle Halpern, '03 (Mother Showman); Rosa Hyde, '02 (Venus); Shinnerrie Jackson, '02 (Cyclops); Leslie Korein, '02 (Bearded Woman); Jonah Mitropoulos, '04 (Fat Man); Erin Shiba, '02 (Twin #1); Kelly Smith, '01 (Fire Breather); Erynn Sosinski, '02 (Stilt Gal); Seth Stewart, '03 (Spotted Boy); Ben Stuber, '03 (Baron Doctor); Marlana Tom, '03 (Twin #2); and Daryl Williams, '03 (Negro Reconstructionist).

Production staff includes set designer Michael Grube, associate professor of theater; costume designer Chris Flaharty, associate professor of theater; puppet designer Pete Koschnik; technical director Rick Mayfield, lecturer in theater; choreographer Mirla Criste, visiting assistant professor in theater; lighting designer Carolyn Wong, '01; sound designer Mark Williams, '02; stage manager Ariel Emerson, '03; and assistant stage manager Jody Epstein, '03.

Playwright and Director

Suzan-Lori Parks (Playwright) is an associate artist at the Yale School of Drama and a member of New Dramatists. Her plays include *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*, a 1990 Obie Award winner for "Best New American Play;" *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*, which was published in the Bedford Introduction to Drama; as well as *The America Play* and *Venus*. She has written various works for radio such as *Pickling*, *Third Kingdom*, and *Locomotive*, and is the author of the screenplay for Spike Lee's film *Girl 6*. Parks is the recipient of a Whiting Foundation Writers Award and two NEA playwriting fellowships, and has been awarded grants by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, among others.

Shannon Forney (Director) is a senior Interdisciplinary Performance/Latin American Studies major from Harpswell, ME. Oberlin credits include: *The House of Yes* (Mrs. Pascal); *On Sundays* (director), *Fefu and Her Friends* (Emma); and Bread and Puppet Internship, Fall '99.