

BACKSTAGE

Land of the Tigers

by Jennie Webb

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Sure, some may call it the worst theatrical debacle to be written, staged, or even conceived. But the masses who will inevitably label *Land of the Tigers* as a Titanic-scale creative disaster are clearly shortsighted. And what is the sign of true genius but critical controversy? Well, that and the sight of bipedal tigers wearing wigs, celebrating newsletter content, and cowering from marauding hoards of swans.

The inspired members of Burglars of Hamm have pulled out all their visionary stops to tell the tale of a band of tigers whose civilization is torn apart by their self-made trappings. At the center of this inspired lesson for the ages is Sabertooth (a masterful Hugo Armstrong), a rebel who reconnects to his animal instincts after he meets the lovely Sheba (Devin Sidell) and clashes with her evil brother Fang Stalkington (Tim Sheridan). However, this is no mere cat-spray love story. The Burglars (Carolyn Almos, Matt Almos, Jon Beauregard, and Albert Dayan—four minds truly capable of high-stakes boggling) have laid out a mythical, metaphorical journey that leaves no cautionary stone unturned as the tigers touch upon each and every theme that could, maybe, possibly, be relevant. With a detailed, Chuck Mangione sensitivity, Matt Almos directs the ensemble (Larry Biederman, Corey Klemow, JJ Mayes, Ruth Silveira, Rebecca Metz, and Shelly Kurtz), each performer brilliantly inhabiting his or her colorful character. And when it comes to creating the distinctive world of Stripey McProwl, Salty Lickylegs, and Minx Furburger, a deep and graceful bow must go to costumer and makeup designer Ann Closs-Farley, as well as to set designer Donna Marquet and lighting designer Chris Wojcieszyn.

When Act 2 of *Land of the Tigers* takes us behind the scenes -- the making of a masterpiece, as it were -- audiences may feel momentarily betrayed. But as much as we want to hold on to the magic, what is revealed about the creative process and group dynamics gives us so much more. With the addition of cast members Cody Henderson and Dean Gregory, we finally get the clarity we didn't even know we were missing. Sure, there are those who may accuse the artists involved of pandering to the tyranny of storytelling. But with its very particular perspective, this production is able to reframe an onstage pander to perfection.