

Daily News
20 Apr 2013

FINAL SHOW OF WCT SEASON

Review: Never Shoot A Stampede Queen

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Going out with a bang is always better than ending with a whimper, and Western Canada Theatre's 2012-2013 season certainly ends on a high note with *Never Shoot A Stampede Queen*.

Adapted by Mark Leiren-Young from his memoir of the same name, this one-man play is a witty, fast-paced tale of small-town journalism, First Nations poverty, Valdy and, yes, stampede queens. Several stampede queens actually.

Leiren-Young's tale won the 2009 Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour and, if the dialogue and anecdotes in the book are as sharp as those in director TJ Dawe's play, it's easy to see why *Stampede Queen* is funny.

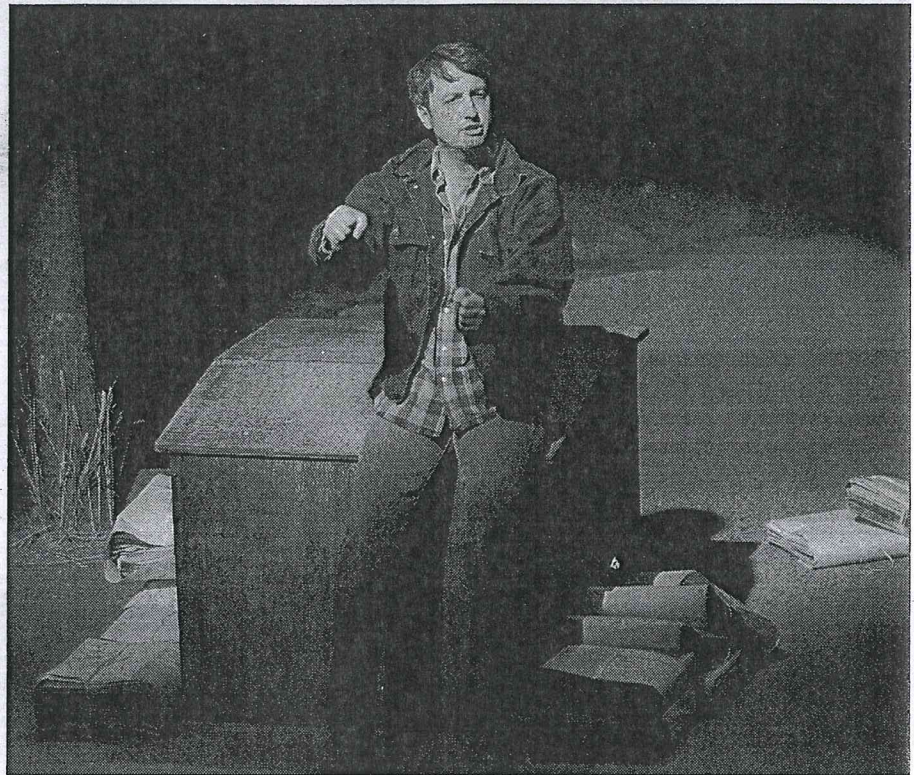
Really funny.

It certainly helps to have a year or two of reporting under your belt, as I do, but even general audiences will find a lot to enjoy in this tale of a 22-year-old journalist from Vancouver who takes a job at the Williams Lake Tribune.

Our protagonist barely makes it into town when he stumbles across an armed robbery at a Mohawk gas station. For the next two years he becomes a news magnet, writing stories that range from the amusing — a feature on a bear trap that just doesn't work — to the tragedy of the Williams Lake's Palace district, where First Nations live in poverty.

Leiren-Young says all the stories are true and the play barely scratches the surface of what he experienced during his time in the Cariboo. True or not — the journalist in me can argue the point either way — the tribulations are funny.

For example, our protagonist learns a hard lesson on why you never take pictures of a stampede queen when the contestant's relatives complain about



RYAN BEIL in a scene from Western Canada Theatre's premiere production of *Never Shoot A Stampede Queen*, on now at Pavilion Theatre.

the quality of pictures that appear in the Tribune.

Turns out, the reporter took a number of pictures, good and bad, but the editor ran the bad ones because he doesn't like stampede queens.

This might not sound amusing on paper, but the way actor Ryan Beil jumps from character to character — he plays more than a dozen people in *Stampede Queen* — is something that must be seen to be believed.

Every character in this play is distinct. The audience is never confused as to whom Beil portrays at any given time. His mannerisms and voice are different for each, and bring Leiren-Young's sharp words to life.

Ever wonder how *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* would go over in Williams Lake? Beil and Leiren-Young provide that insight in a scene complete with a dance number that had the Pavilion audience at Thursday's preview in stitches.

Things get serious in *Stampede Queen* from time to time, but it's Leiren-Young's humour and Beil's performance that win the day. The author/playwright was among the preview audience and laughed as hard as everyone else.

Never Shoot A Stampede Queen is a fun and funny way to bring the theatre season to a close. The play premieres tonight at the Pavilion and runs until May 4.

