True West Provides a True View of the Dysfunctional Family

Strong performances and realistic fight sequences make play memorable.

By Jennifer Meyer
REPORTER

Creighton's fine and performing arts department is presenting Sam Shepard's Pulitzer Prize winning play True West, a story about a dysfunctional American family and the results of its deterioration.

The plot centers around two brothers, the aspiring yuppy screenwriter Austin, played by Matt Gonzales, and the rough drifter, Lee, played by Matt Niemann. Austin is staying at his mother's home while trying to write a romantic screenplay when Lee decides to drift home.

Lee has lived alone most of his life, depending only on himself. He is very harsh and forceful, invading his brother's lifestyle like a predator.

The portrayal of the dysfunctional family is strong, full of fights, harsh words and bitter feelings about their parents and their childhood.

The brothers' constant fighting was choreographed by Terry Doughman. Each of the fights worked to convey the desperate actions of Lee and Austin, seemingly trapped by their own environment. Both brothers seem to cling to a hope that they can change their environment.

Animal references pervade the script, whether it is the coyotes howling in the distance, the constant chirping of crickets, or the pit bull that Lee used to own. These references constantly tie back to the relationship between man and beast and what separates them, or for that instance, what does not separate them.

The strongest performance came from Niemann, the rough-edged and violent drifter who doesn't flinch at stealing from the neighbors or polishing off several cases of Budweiser. His entire presence mimicked that of an animal protecting and fighting for his territory.

Gonzales gives a good performance, playing an insecure screenwriter who is so easily intimidated by his powerful brother. Niemann and Gonzales worked well together, especially during their fights and violent verbal exchanges.

Tim Reilly adds a quirky touch as Saul, a Hollywood producer courting Austin's script. He had just the right touch of snobbishness to fit into his character.

The appearance of Lee and Austin's mother at the end of the play rounds out the picture of a dysfunctional family gone bad. Krystal Kremka plays up her short role as the mother, giving more meaning to the brothers' problems.

The set, designed by senior design student Ross Manhart, was wonderful. It set the entire play in the traditional middle class home that is still has some residue from the 1960s. Even the lighting and sound completed the whole picture of the perfect life gone awry.

True West closes Sunday. Performances will be Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2:30 p.m. at the Creighton University Interim Performing Arts Center, 30th and Burt streets.