

Dal Theatre feeds from the trough

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- Assistant to the Director

For the latest Dalhousie Theatre Department production, you have to come prepared for a few surprises. Imagine yourself on a bench, sitting with animals in a farmyard. A child opens a picture book and starts to read. Now feel the sudden rustling of discontent and follow the smolderings of passion — suddenly the animals burst into action with song.

Animal Farm is a musical play which makes a fairy tale of the horror and terror of living in a totalitarian state. This final production of the Theatre Department's season starts with a rebellion by a group of animals against a lazy, drunkard farmer. The story traces what becomes of their newly won freedom.

This production's cast consists of all thirty available students from the acting program. The director, Patrick Christopher, is exploring new ways of using the Sir James Dunn Theatre — *Animal Farm* represents an opportunity to blend the oldest theatrical techniques with the newest. The great Dunn space calls for the statu-

esque, with emphasis on speech and the primitive ritual of classical Greek theatre. The theme and context of the work, however, are perfect for the physical theatre of cruelty, of characters signalling through the flames.

All the elements for a good story are here: good against evil, the underdog against the powerful, and absolute power corrupting absolutely. It takes all types to make a world and Orwell has created this in microcosm. Follow the heroic carthorse Boxer, the wise but long suffering donkey Benjamin, the frivolous Mollie, loyal Muriel and caring Clover. The pigs are the ones who learn to read and to take responsibility for the farm. They have to manage the special interests of the hens and sheep, of cows and dogs.

The original story, written by Orwell in 1945, was an immediate success because the western world was still grappling with the shadow of dictatorships. A dedicated democrat, Orwell had personal experience, as a writer, with the images that he paints in this childlike story. By adopting the term "comrade"

for speech, and by the parallels with historic figures such as Stalin and Trotsky, he was clearly aiming sharp criticism against communist Russia. But Orwell was also damning totalitarianism in all forms. In methods of oppression, there are echoes as recently as the Ceaucescu regime in Rumania.

The fact that Orwell's story was adapted for the stage 30 years later, by Peter Hall in 1985, is a testament to its longevity. The songs and choruses by Adrian Mitchell and Richard Peaslee have an immediate appeal.

The Dunn production of *Animal Farm* features the physical acting and staging of the Dalhousie Theatre Department in an exciting way. It can be appreciated for its historical and philosophical interest, or just as a good action-packed and dramatic story.

Public performances of *Animal Farm* run from April 2nd to 5th with a Saturday matinee. Tickets cost \$10 regular and \$5 for students. Call the box office at 494-3820 for more information.

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coming next week, y'all.

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