

# As Is: looking past AIDS stereotype

**As Is**  
**Phoenix Theatre**

review by Mike Spindloe

How funny can a play about AIDS be? Judging from the excellent opening night performance of William Hoffman's *As Is* given by the Phoenix Theatre, dramatization of the second biggest fear of the twentieth century can be very funny indeed, not to mention sensitive, humane, and powerful.

The story centers on the effect AIDS has on Rich (Larry Yachimec), who has the disease, and his former lover and still (as it turns out) best friend, Saul (Richard Gishler), as well as a small host of peripheral characters: the self-styled, but slightly warped, Florence Nightingale type (Maralyn Ryan), Rich's heterosexual brother (Robert Koons), and his current lover (Tim Battle).

As the play opens, Rich has come to Saul's place to settle the division of their worldly possessions, the fallout from the breakup of their relationship some months earlier. Rich's edginess and lack of concern for even his most valued possessions leads to the admission that he has AIDS. This is by far the weakest scene in the play, but serves to establish the foundation for the rest.

We get glimpses of society's attitudes and misconceptions about AIDS from the reactions of the people in Rich's life. His brother wonders if it's safe to breathe the same air, his present lover spurns him, and the hospital nurse views him as another case. Only Saul stands by his friend through the initial denial, ultimate acceptance, and lingering anger that accompanies the fatal disease.

One of the central motifs of the play is that of fear, something that everyone who comes into contact with AIDS must face. For Rich there is fear of dying, for homosexuals in general there is fear of contracting the disease (at one point blackly referred to as "the gay plague"), and, of course, for heterosexuals there is fear as a result of ignorance.

There is nothing revelatory in the information contained in the play, especially if you've followed media coverage of the spread of AIDS over the past few years, but *As Is* should be rightfully considered an educational as well as an entertaining experience. At the very least, it will show you the human aspect of the effects of AIDS that you probably hadn't thought of previously.

To its credit, it does this while presenting gays out of the effeminate stereotype. Instead, they are shown as they are, as people attempting to deal with a terrifying experience that they have only marginal control over in a preventative sense and none whatsoever if they become afflicted.

The best part of the play, though, is the

performance of Larry Yachimec and Richard Gishler. Yachimec's role of Rich is the more emotionally demanding, but he carries it off convincingly, while Gishler's Saul, playing a more limited emotional

range as the true friend who will take Rich "as is", makes a perfect foil.

*As Is* is a success on any level you care to examine it upon, even if that's only as an evening's worth of entertainment. If the

spread of AIDS has set back the image of the homosexual community in society back decades, then a presentation such as this can perhaps help to bring it forward at least a few years.

## Mind control the media way

Media controls you. Uh Huh, your mind is putty that can be melded. By simply controlling the information that reaches you, the media can alter your emotions, your lifestyle, what you get angry about, WHAT YOU DO. (period)

Let's start with an example: our own

"Army ABM Rocket Test Succeeds"?

Using the proper emphasis, Television, Books, and Magazines can damn well sway your opinion. You are at the mercy of the editors (much like I am). Every segment of the media has its own particular slant. You may even have noticed the mild (!) leftist

als) have a stranglehold on some aspect of the media, or the media in a certain region. Take, for instance, the city of Regina, Saskatchewan. There, one corporation headed by a few individuals controls the only newspaper, half the TV stations, more than 50% of the radio stations. They control so much of the media, in fact, that they were barred from further acquisitions by anti-monopoly laws. Despite the laws, it sounds like a pretty big monopoly to me. They own most of the board; even in the game, that's how you win.

The common ploys used to sway you are targeted at your emotions; pictures of starving children or big religious denuncia-

## Making Waves

by Dragos Ruiu

friendly publishing giant the *Journal*. Lately (past two weeks), there has surfaced a large trend in the news content: Nuclear Awareness, SDI, etc... You have probably noticed these stories and started to consider the implications of nuclear deterrence.

BUT, have you also considered the extremely slanted presentation it is giving? Probably not. The truth is that the presentation of the facts is just as important as the facts themselves. Every argument is a two-edged sword, and which edge the media uses will probably decide your allegiance.

Sure, now you say: "Yeah, but I have a

*The competition is usually just as slanted as the other guys...*

mind of my own. I can decide for myself." Yes, you probably can, (I hope). IF you know the facts. But who controls the facts that reach you? That ubiquitous word pops up again, MEDIA.

In these days of informational overload, no one but no one has enough time to digest the information we are constantly bombarded with. So we skim. And are we likely to read the article titled in four inch letters "Prominent Professors Say Star Wars Impossible" on page A1 or the little side bar on X678 that says in contract fine print,

slant in most CUP papers, or the almost susceptible right-wing tendency in the *Plain Truth*.

But rejoice, there is a great equalizer in all this. It is called competition. When the media is not monopolized, there are differing viewpoints available to us. We can then decide for ourselves.

But, weep. The competition is usually just as slanted as the other guys. And the competition is usually on the brink of survival.

Often, some companies (even individu-



*So you as the individual are at the mercy of the media*

tions. These are somewhat transparent, so there are always statistics and seemingly cold hard facts. (You know the old adage: white lies, dirty lies, then statistics.) This approach is more effective and much more difficult to detect.

The toughest to detect is the lie of omission. The journalist who ignores a story because it will anger the wrong people, or anyone else who removes something from the public light for petty politics. Take the instance of the *Calgary Herald*, which once killed a story about lawyers lying because of pressure from the legal fraternity, for an example.

So you as the individual, are essentially at the mercy of the media. Do not blindly accept what you see on TV and read in the papers. It may sound mildly paranoid, but there is a good chance you are seeing what you are because someone wants to sway you. Take it with a grain of salt.

Just like you should take this article. After all, I'm trying to sway you. I certainly haven't presented both sides of the issue, just what I need to make you consider this viewpoint. So there.

Remember, above all think...

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