

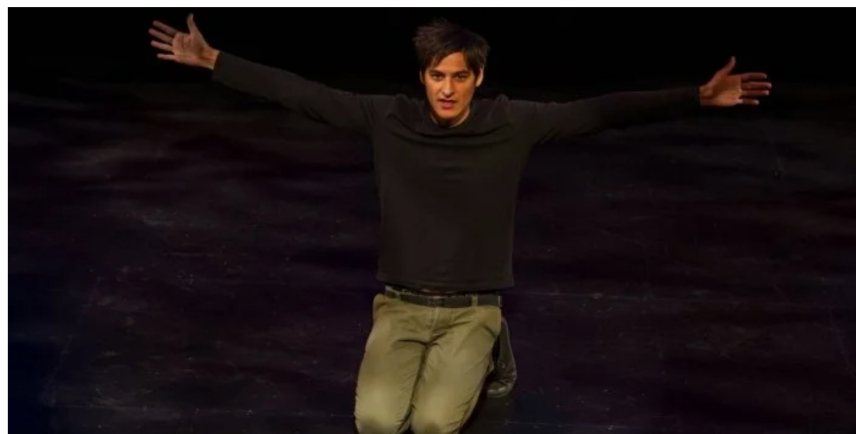


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Huff challenges with its tragic story

Neptune Theatre partners with the Prismatic Arts Festival to present Cliff Cardinal's one-person show on its Scotiabank Stage from October 4-9.

By Mark Robins October 3, 2022



Cliff Cardinal blends the mythical with the realities of First Nations life in Huff. Photo by Akipari.

As part of this year's Prismatic Arts Festival, Halifax's Neptune Theatre has partnered with the annual celebration of works by Indigenous artists and artists of colour to present Cliff Cardinal's Huff.

Running October 4-9 on the company's Scotiabank Stage, Huff is a wrenching yet darkly comic tale of Wind and his brothers, caught in a torrent of solvent abuse, struggling to cope with the death of their mother.

"Huff began, like all my stories do, as a creative exploration of the pain of those living outside the mainstream: the weirdos, the addicts, and the romantics," says Cardinal. "To take the characters to their lowest, where they hurt the most, and to find them there with love."

Performing his one-person show over 200 times in the last decade, Cardinal has garnered numerous awards and accolades. Among them is my review of a performance at Vancouver's PuSh International Performing Arts Festival:

Cliff Cardinal's Huff is so devastatingly tragic that it will take your breath away. It is a stark reminder that we still have much to do as a society.

A distillation of the First Nations' plight in the 21st century, Huff covers a lot of ground in its short 70 minutes: teen pregnancy, domestic abuse, sexual abuse, substance and alcohol abuse, fetal alcohol syndrome, and suicide.

If it sounds a little dark, it is. Even as Cardinal uses a liberal dose of humour with the help of the mythical Trickster to help us traverse this terrifyingly sad tale, the overwhelming sentiment is a lack of hope. There is no Hollywood feel-good ending here. And while its hopelessness and subject matter may disturb, it is still an unfortunate reality that includes a suicide rate among Aboriginal

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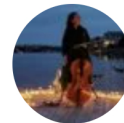
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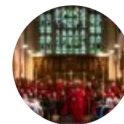
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youth that is five to six times higher than non-Aboriginal youth.

Seamlessly blending the mythological with life on a First Nations reserve and the surreal hallucinations from all manner of highs, *Cardinal* is the consummate storyteller. Told largely through the voice of the middle brother of three, he moves easily between the many characters in his story, inhabiting each with a natural ease that is at times as scary as Huff's subject matter.

Breaking down the fourth wall on several occasions, he challenges the audience directly, insisting that we not only bear witness but also become a part of this world. In one compelling scene, he pleads with an audience member to give him back the plastic bag that she ripped from his head at the top of the show.

White man's guilt can be a powerful thing. Even if there is little optimism in *Cardinal's Huff*, the cycle cannot be broken until we find solutions. From there comes hope. It is one thing to bear witness; it is quite another to take action. Huff insists on both. We should listen.

Huff plays Neptune Theatre's Scotiabank Stage (1593 Argyle St, Halifax) from October 4-9 as part of the 2022 Prismatic Arts Festival. Visit neptunetheatre.com for tickets and information.

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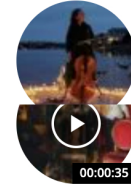
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