

# ON STAGE



Paul Dunn

## PTERODACTYLS ★★☆☆

Featuring Charlotte Gowdy, Ross McKenzie. Written by Nicky Silver. Directed by Matthew Kutas. Presented by Shakti Entertainment. To June 20. Tue-Sat 8pm; Sun mat 2:30pm. \$28; Sun mat PWYC. Tarragon Theatre Mainspace, 30 Bridgman. 416-531-1827. [www.pterodactyls.ca](http://www.pterodactyls.ca).

## Jurassic lark

A two-hour shriek of delusion, retardation, shit-disturbing and death, family reunion comedy *Pterodactyls* plays like a warped version of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in which every character is Blanche.

Our story begins with Todd Duncan (Ross McKenzie), who's dying of AIDS and returns home to quietly perish in peace. Unfortunately, events in the Duncan household have just reached fever pitch: Todd's sister Emma (Charlotte Gowdy) has brought over a new fiancé, a waifish rape-victim named Tommy (Paul Dunn), only for him to be hired by her mother (Sarah Dodd) as a live-in maid — complete with lacy apron.

It's not as if Emma doesn't have problems of her own. Having been sexually abused by her father (Don Allison) as a child, she's developed repressed-memory syndrome overload and can barely remember who her brother is, let alone what she did five minutes ago. Todd, meanwhile, finds it impossible to talk to his family about his illness (Son: "I have

AIDS." Mom: "We'll have a buffet."), and takes revenge by seducing the sexually naïve Tommy for one final fling.

The Tarragon has a crackling production here, all done up in the best possible taste, which is to say, none at all. Nicky Silver's script is a tart cocktail of punch-lines and put-downs. The centrepiece of the set, a T-Rex sculpture comprised only of tennis rackets and stilettos, is a work of art in itself.

Both cast and crew are also on sucker-punch form. Director Matthew Kutas paces the play with a farcical freneticism that never descends into bawling camp. Gowdy is both hilarious and poignant as the lost soul, Emma, while Allison's odd resemblance to Lloyd Robertson only exacerbates his magnificent creepiness.

I'm not sure the play's final 15 minutes, which involve a sudden and spastic change of pace, entirely work: Silver provides too pat a conclusion and his characters are ultimately too sitcommy to believe. But on the whole this is terrific entertainment.

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