

Edmonton Journal Review

LOON

By Liz Nicholls

Published August 20th, 2012

4 STARS

There is something mysterious, magical even, about the way a mask suddenly comes to life atop an actor's body. That's what happens in *Loon*, an expertly wistful, wordless little romantic fantasy from Portland's Wonderheads, the mask theatre specialists who brought us *Grim & Fischer* last year.

In their latest, we meet a sad-eyed cinema janitor (Kate Braidwood), with a lugubrious air and a wide, down-turned mouth like Mr. Toad. He's a solitary slump of a guy, luckless in love, who still worships at the shrine of his late mother. He's tried, in a hopelessly hopeful sort of way, to find romance; he's bachelor #378 (favourite colour: "plaid") at a dating service. "You have no new messages" is the constant refrain he hears when he checks his romantic updates by phone. His shoulders sag still further under the weight of inevitability.

Ah, but you can't read a man by his plaid exterior, *Loon* reminds us. Our hero has a subterranean fantasy life, where *Paper Moon* or the theme from *Casablanca* are his signature songs. He imagines himself an action movie hero. Wonderheads has a sharp instinct for the humour potential in pathos. And the awwwww factor is mined with minute economy of physical gesture and adjustment by Braidwood, under the direction of her Wonderheads partner Andrew Phoenix.

Is our hero doomed to loveless solitude, teetering on the precipice of despair? By moonlight, anything can happen. That's when you realize, along with him, that he's fallen in love with the moon. And the sheer fantastical improbability of it all is transforming. The same thing is true of the outsized mask Braidwood wears. It seems to acquire every shade of expression, from the quizzical to the startled.

It's a simple, classic underdog story, the rediscovery of the sense of possibility. And it's told with beautiful physicality.