

## Actor crowns play with expert touch

By JASON HARDY  
Senior staff writer

Replicating the dysfunction of a 12th century royal family isn't easy.

So when the University of Nebraska-Lincoln theater department picked "The Lion In Winter," a James Goldman comedy-drama about Henry II and his search for an heir to his throne, they decided to capitalize on the play's difficult nature.

To play the role of Henry II, they brought in David Wiles, an Equity actor who was trained at the Yale School of Drama and Shakespeare & Company and is currently an instructor at the University of South Carolina.

On top of those credentials, Wiles has also performed in a wide variety of companies, plays, television shows and films. Needless to say, he's experienced.

Playing opposite Wiles is Shirley Carr Mason, the head of the Professional Actor Training Program in UNL's theater department who plays Eleanor of Aquitaine. The rest of the cast is made up of undergraduates.

By bringing in a professional, the department has killed two birds with one stone. Not only is there a top-notch actor playing the lead, the students have a chance to work with a professional — something many don't get to do until after graduation.

### Theater Preview The Facts

**What:** "The Lion in Winter"  
**Where:** Studio Theatre, Temple Building, 12th & R streets  
**When:** 7:30 tonight (student preview), Fri, Sat and Oct. 26-30  
**Cost:** \$6 for students, \$9 for UNL faculty/staff/senior citizens, \$10 for others, \$5 for student preview tickets.  
**The Skinny:** University production features two professional actors.

"At the University of South Carolina, it's a regular part of our practice," Wiles said. "We want to expose students to working professionals."

He said that even in large metropolitan areas, where theater performances are a regular occurrence, student actors don't gain an experience quite like this.

"Seeing an actor perform is not the same as working with somebody," Wiles said. "This is the best kind of exposure."

What makes Wiles' stage work different from his classroom work is that when he's on stage, he's an actor, not a teacher. He isn't there to hand-feed students information on how he works, but rather to come in and do the job well.

Kyle Johnston, an undergraduate playing Henry II's son, Geoffrey, said having Wiles in the play was helpful.

"We wouldn't be doing this play if it wasn't for him," Johnston said. "I've made an effort to take note of the kind of work he's done. A lot of my instruc-



MIKE WARREN/DN

DAVID WYLES plays King Henry II in "The Lion In Winter," which is being put on by the UNL theater department.

tors have been female, and it was kind of interesting to see how he approached this role."

For Wiles, the role is difficult. He said it is one of the most difficult roles he's ever played and one with which he's struggled. So far, the production has been as much of a learning experience for him as it has been for the students.

"I hope there's some value in (the undergraduate cast) watching me struggle," Wiles said. "If you're going

to be good at this, whether you're successful or not, you're going to be studying for the rest of your life.

"You can succeed in this business, in television and some film, without having to study, because people hire who you are as a personality. On stage, you can't get away with that.

"I'm here demonstrating that I still have to work hard at this."

The play, despite taking place 800 years ago, was written in a contemporary English style. Much of the lan-

guage is used to reveal certain things and hide others, making it hard for some of the actors to explore the intentions behind some of the dialogue.

While this is difficult, Wiles said a play such as "The Lion in Winter" is exactly what student actors need.

"You need to expose people to a wide range of difficulty," Wiles said.

"You're responsible for exposing students to a range of challenges, so it's really great to give students something as difficult as this play."

## This 'Fight' is a blood-filled mess

By SAMUEL MCKEWON  
Senior staff writer

"Fight Club" brilliantly succeeds in exactly one way: It moves so fast and covers so much ground that it's easy to gloss over the fact that it's largely a failure.

It is a film with a great first act — it has one of the best opening 40 minutes film has seen in years. Had it ended right there, "Fight Club" would have been a classic.

But then it wouldn't have been called "Fight Club." Then again, it wouldn't have been followed by 100 minutes of misery — a blood-filled mess.

Based on a novel by Chuck Palaniuk, the title doesn't surface until well into the film. Though Edward Norton and Brad Pitt have gotten all the publicity, it is director David Fincher's film, and we watch it spiral down the drain of sophomoric humor and action.

Norton is the narrator, occasionally called Jack, a soulless worker-drone at an auto insurance company who spends his free time salivating over Ikea catalog purchases and battling insomnia. He's a consumer, see, and that's bad, as the movie says over and over and over again.

But Jack's insomnia has a cure: cancer support groups, which Norton's character is addicted to because of his need to cry. He's a faker, but nobody notices, and for once, someone's listening. Then the chain-smoking Marla (Helena Bonham Carter), looking like she just got pulled out of the trash, crashes the party.

Marla's a faker, too. Her presence irks Jack to the point of madness. More insomnia. Then Jack meets Tyler Durden (Pitt). Insomnia cured.

Tyler's got a plan, which includes a fight club, a ramshackle organization where men beat each other up. The violence that ensues among the most gratuitous and visceral in recent memory.

Do you like watching faces goosh into cold hard cement while the soundtrack echoes a collage of bones breaking and blood dripping? "Fight Club" is perfect for the male homoerotic masochistic torture-maven in us all.

The movie trumps its blood with a generous helping of heavy-handed, "the-world-is-going-straight-to-hell" messages, which Pitt delivers from the pulpit. They are:

■ Men are all screwed up and full of rage.

■ Beating each other up somehow allows them to release all the pent-up aggression.

■ But beating people up is only the beginning. It gets much, much worse.

■ Materialism rules the world.

■ False idols are bad.

I've listened to many individuals, mostly male, explain these theories at length: The hidden message here, the sublime context there, the brilliant meaning behind that blow to the face.

Whatever. Fincher (whose best movie is the joke-within-a-joke "The Game," which is only marginally good), Norton and Pitt might want it to be there, but it isn't. Norton is good as the drone, but his performance falls into a pattern. His face constantly drained of blood (except for the cuts and bruises), Norton slips into caricature.

He fares better than Pitt, whose acting never gets out of caricature land. The first three lines he has are funny, but Pitt reverts back to all his old tricks, such as acting with his hand (watch for the bar scene) and acting like a fool.

Those who love the movie (and there have been a number who have) will say that's part of the point. One moment Tyler's falling over on a bike, the next he's delivering a somber monologue a la Marlon Brando in "Apocalypse Now." Which guy is he? No one seems to know.

The only real woman character in the movie, Marla, changes too — or at least the movie changes her — from ragamuffin-wench to goth angel without a hint of any reason why.

I haven't given much away as to the plot. There's nothing to give. "Fight Club" is hollow and, ultimately, predictable. The secret of the film is right there in the first two minutes.

Its opening act is exhilarating and satirical with a touch of whimsy. But the movie departs from greatness and sets off on a path only a Columbine killer could love.

This is what happens when a good movie goes and does a bad, bad thing.

## 'Fight Club' has hidden meaning

By CLIFF HICKS  
Staff writer

"Fight Club" is not for everyone.

Those who don't get the film's message will say it's about nothing more than bone-crunching, blood-spurting violence — primal savagery consisting of two guys simply beating the hell out of one another.

Those same people will also claim the film has too much going on, too many things happen-

ing, too many ideas, concepts and conflicting messages to make any sense. Unfortunately, these people simply never understood the movie.

It's easy, perhaps too easy, to gloss over the deeper meanings of the film, the subtle touches and the harsh contradicting messages director David Fincher fires out without simplifying anything or slowing down to let audiences catch their breath.

Simply put, "Fight Club" asks a ton of questions very fast and provides very little answers.

This, however, is a strong point of the film, not

the weak link.

At the heart of the film is the story of the narrator (Edward Norton) and his relationship to Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt). The narrator is a weak-willed man who goes to self-help groups to feel better about himself, lives in an Ikea-furnished apartment and has no idea who he really is as a person.

Enter Tyler Durden, whom the narrator meets on an airplane. Tyler has an answer to everything. He lives a devil-may-care life and says whatever is on his mind.

From the proms, everyone knows Tyler and the narrator eventually start "Fight Club," a subterranean gathering where men get together and beat the crap out of one another to get in touch with themselves.

Here's where the film starts to really get wild. I don't want to spoil the plot, which rushes into a faster and faster ride with more and more going on. And here's where the audience splits into those who'll get it and those who won't.

The thing that makes "Fight Club" such a fascinating movie is that every few minutes, something sprouts from the film that contradicts something that occurred earlier. Every strand of sense that appears is whisked away by something else.

Durden and the narrator are always talking, and the constant debate over what is right and wrong makes for heavy thinking. Part of the time, "Fight Club" gives audiences something to laugh about with its tongue-in-cheek remarks and slick movie talk, but the rest of the time, the movie falls somewhere between diatribe and socio-political commentary.

"Fight Club" is a movie of details. The ability to connect what's appearing on the screen with what's being said is needed for a greater understanding of how the plot fits into the real world. And that's one of the major tricks of the movie.

To watch "Fight Club" is to see a movie that exists with one foot in a fictional world and one foot in the real world. In some ways similar to "Ferris Bueller's Day Off," "Fight Club" is a story aware of its audience at least part of the time.

Fincher as a director has always made smart films. While "Alien 3" is disliked by many fans of the series, it remains a solid film. Fincher's more recent works, "Seven" and "The Game," are films that require a bit more mental power than your average film.

But in a world full of people who prefer to follow rather than lead, "Fight Club" probably won't be a popular film.

Some will be downright disgusted with its borderline misogyny (perfectly demonstrated by Helena Bonham Carter's character — she was the wrong actress for the role anyway), its constant self-contradiction and the sheer bravado of the film's ending.

And that's a shame, because "Fight Club" has a lot of provocative questions to ask about a society full of people selling answers.

Like most of Fincher's films, "Fight Club" comes highly recommended, but not for the weak of heart or faint of spirit.

### Film Review The Facts

**Title:** "Fight Club"

**Director:** David Fincher

**Rating:** R (a lotta bit of the ultraviolence, snapshot of male genitalia)

**Stars:** Edward Norton, Brad Pitt, Helena Bonham Carter

**McKewon's View:**

**Grade:** D

**Five Words:** What a mess it

became.

**Hick's View:**

**Grade:** B+

**Five Words:** "Fight Club" has uphill

fight.