

April 13 - 28, 2007

Terra Nova

Reviewed by [Brad Hathaway](#)

Running time 2:20 - one intermission

An intelligent production of a challenging history play

It's hard to believe that a detached feeling of reflection and contemplation can make a production of a play about the dying thoughts of a committed adventurer emotionally involving when an overdose of histrionics would harm it, but Don Petersen's nicely intellectual sense of distance serves this historical drama quite well. It isn't that the characters on stage don't have emotional flare-ups. They do argue, struggle and try to fix blame for disaster. Through it all, however, the production seems to be examining the reasons the hardy explorers who "attacked" the South Pole in 1911-1912 were willing to undergo such hardships and even lose their lives. In the process, it is examining the drives toward discovery, fame and duty that bound these men together. The approach is particularly appropriate because it is a match for the playwright's apparent concentration on just these themes in constructing his rather detached but nonetheless fascinating view of an historical event.



Storyline: Captain Robert Falcon Scott recalls his failed attempt to be the first explorer to reach the South Pole as he tries to complete his diary entries before becoming the last member of his team to die on the way back from reaching the pole only to find that the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen had beaten them to the prize.

The play is by Ted Tally, best known for his work as a screen writer. He wrote *The Silence of the Lambs*, a movie that examined the inner workings of the mind of a man who did extraordinary things. The same topic is at work here although the "extraordinary things" were less socially unacceptable. Tally's screenplay about the serial killer Hannibal Lecter was based on a novel by Thomas Harris. His play about explorer Robert Falcon Scott is based principally on the journals and letters found on his frozen body. The play was written in 1977, more than a decade before *The Silence of the Lambs*. Its concentration is on the inner workings of Scott's mind - his goals, his dreams, his passions. It takes a nearly clinical look at its subject. Director Petersen makes sure that sense of examination comes through while allowing his cast to explore some of the exposed nerves that people under pressure display.

That cast includes Blakeman Brophy, who does a fine job of displaying the strength of character that Captain Scott exhibited, even as it brought him and his men to disaster. Each of the four members of Scott's team who died on the frozen surface of Antarctica are given distinct personalities by the actors in the company. Jon Whittle is perhaps the most fascinating of the performers in the company playing what was Tally's greatest dramatic liberty in the script, bringing the Norwegian explorer who beats Scott to the pole to life in Scott's mind, carrying on a dialogue with him over the responsibility he has for his men and the approach he should be pursuing.

The events are played out on a white stage draped with white muslin given ice-blue lighting while Alan Wray's sound effects of wind and storm add to the atmosphere. Wray also provides dramatic incidental music including an effective underscoring of the final moments of the play. An indication of the seriousness with which the entire team approached this project is the listing in the program of two dialect coaches - Carol Strachan for British accents and Bruce Follmer for Norwegian.

Written by Ted Tally. Directed by Don Petersen. Design: John Downing (set) Paul Andrew Morton (costumes) Bette Williams (hair and make-up) Judy Kee (properties) Ken and Patti Crowley (lights) Alan Wray (sound) Doug Olmsted (photography) Robert S. Kraus (stage manager). Cast: Blakeman Brophy, Ken Clayton, Gary Cramer, Erin Gallalee, Carl Brandt Long, Scott Olson, Jon Whittle.