



**TAPESTRY
OPERA**

Rocking Horse Winner Access Guide



**November 1 to 12, 2023
Guloien Theatre, Streetcar Crowsnest**

We are looking forward to having you join us for *Rocking Horse Winner* at the Guloien Theatre. This guide uses plain language to provide audiences, particularly neurodiverse audiences, with specific sensory details of programming in advance to help guide your experience.

Do you need more information?

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Guloein Theatre



The Guloein Theatre is a 2,400-square-foot, 220-seat theatre with cavernous 22-foot ceilings. It is one of two theatres at Streetcar Crowsnest, the home of Crow's Theatre. The walls of the theatre are made from dark brown brick.

When you enter the theatre, the stage will be to your left and the seating will be to your right. There are ten rows of seating with two aisles near the far left and right. The seats are loose black armless chairs. The first row of seating is on the same level of the stage, which is fully accessible and barrier-free.

Relaxed Performance

Relaxed Performances are open to everyone, but we have adapted the environment specifically for those who are neurodivergent and may experience sensory sensitivities, folks with communication or learning disabilities, and people who would benefit from a more relaxed theatre environment. During a Relaxed Performance, patrons can enter and exit the theatre, use fidget toys, make noise or vocalize, stand up and move about the space as needed, and use their phones. Some technical elements, including lighting and sound, have been adjusted for this performance. The house lights will remain on at a reduced level throughout the show, and a quiet space will be available in the lobby for those who need to take a break during the performance.

The **7:30 PM performance on November 8** will be a Relaxed Performance. An Access Table will be available onsite with Relaxed Performance Consultants Emily Maxwell, Ali Hand, and Nathan Sartore, who will also have fidget toys and earplugs for patrons needing them.

There will also be a Quiet Space in the lobby for patrons needing a break during the show.

About Rocking Horse Winner

This is the story of Ava and her son Paul. Their house and an old rocking horse whisper words only Paul can hear. When the voice of the house grows more urgent in whispering, "There must be more money," Paul enlists his lucky rocking horse to tell him the names of live horse race winners. He begins betting with great success, but each win comes at an enormous cost.

Content Warnings and Advisories

Rocking Horse Winner contains a character's death, a dysfunctional mother-son relationship, and gambling. Some sequences are dark and shadowy.

Synopsis

Rocking Horse Winner primarily explores the relationship between Paul, a young adult, and his mother Ava.

Paul is driven to bridge the relationship with his mother, but Ava sees Paul's attempts to engage as fussy and considers motherhood an obligation. She remains distant, trapped in a materialistic reverie. Driven into poverty by "bad luck", Ava longs for past luxuries, and her gloom pervades the house to the point where the walls themselves whisper in Paul's ear.

Paul assures his mother that he's lucky, and he'll fix their bad luck himself. He runs upstairs to ride his rocking horse, who he thinks will help him. As he rides, he goes into a trance, calling out a mysterious name.

Paul's uncle Oscar hears the noise and enters the room. An exhausted Paul tells Oscar the rocking horse has a new name every week; last week his name was Blue Peter. Oscar realizes this was the winner of last week's horse race, and off-handedly asks Paul for betting tips for today's race. Paul answers far too firmly for it to be guesswork. Sensing possibility but needing proof, Oscar calls in the caretaker, Bassett, and the three head to the upcoming race.

Doubt turns to awe and then to excitement as Oscar and Bassett discover Paul isn't guessing but *predicting* the winning horses. The cash starts rolling in for everyone. Oscar can stop lying about his poverty, Bassett can quit his job, and Paul is finally able to make his mother happy, but insists his part in things stay hidden.

However, it's not enough for Ava. She spends it as fast as Paul makes it, filling their home with more and more. The house joins in, asking for increasing amounts of decoration and decadence. Paul rides his rocking horse again and again, sometimes long into the night, desperate to make her happy and to stop the house from singing in his ears.

After one last ride, Paul predicts the winner of the biggest race of the season. Oscar and Bassett bet everything, and Paul has made everyone incredibly rich. And yet, his mother remains unhappy. Desperate, drained, barely alive, he climbs one last time on the horse, and dies alone.

Music Description

It's best to describe *Rocking Horse Winner's* music using the opening line of the show: nothing is as it should be.

This is not to say it's incorrect; far from it. Rather, it is intense and masterful at creating exactly what the drama calls for, which is often a sense of unease and foreboding. DH Lawrence's story is famous, and many will know the ending before setting foot in the theatre. Thus, Gareth Williams' music purposefully haunts the ear just as Ava's need for more haunts her family, reflecting the psyche of each character as if through an antique mirror.

There is a reminiscence of Debussy's treatment of text, and the usage of certain motivic elements (particularly one tone cluster) serve to ground the soundscape. There are flavours of minimalism, ala Glass, Reich, and Pärt joined to ethereal moments, complex rhythmic sections, and engaging melodies.

The result is a textural feast made of both gossamer and granite.

Scene Breakdown

Opening Scene

A waltz. During this brief piece of toy-like music, Ava recalls her naive past. With her in shadow below, a coo-coo-clock-like shadow ballet plays out on the upper floor. A young woman meets a young man at a dance, they dance, they kiss, and they get pregnant rather quickly. At the end there is the gift of a rocking horse. Just as the piano keys are pounded by Ava on the lower floor, turning our attention to Ava and Scene 1, in the shadow ballet the father steps away from the mother, ruining the happy but naive beginning.

Scene 1 - Ava at the Piano

The waltz is cut short. Ava discloses how far she's fallen and how difficult she finds caring for her son.

Scene 2 - Ava and Paul Talk About Luck

Paul is curious about why he and his mother don't have a car, and Ava explains it's because they're poor. Paul again asks why that's so, and Ava states it's because his father has no luck. Paul announces that *he* is lucky.

Scene 3 - Paul Rides His Rocking Horse

Paul creeps upstairs and rides his rocking horse, asking it to take him to where luck is. He rides faster and faster and at the peak, shouts a name: Daffodil.

Scene 4 - Paul Tells Uncle Oscar His Secret

Uncle Oscar enters, having heard the noise, and asks Paul what's going on. Paul reveals his secret: the rocking horse is lucky, and tells him the names of race horses. Oscar calls in Paul's caretaker, Bassett, who admits Paul tells him the names of *winning* race horses. The three head to the races to prove it.

Scene 5 - At the Races

Paul is nearly overwhelmed by the noise, but manages. Oscar and Bassett place their bets on Daffodil. Bassett takes the role of a race announcer, and the three watch Paul's prediction come true. The three sing of how this will change everything. Race horse puppets on long sticks are used by the house to depict the race.

Scene 6 - Paul Tells Oscar About the House

Paul tells Oscar he hopes the winnings will stop the house from singing. Paul hears "her" sing of how there's never enough, how there must be more. He makes Oscar promise not to tell his mother about where the money comes from; it might ruin the luck. Oscar tells him to never stop riding.

Scene 7 - Ava at the Piano, with Paul

Paul asks his mother why she always sings sad songs and if she knows anything happier. Ava rebukes him. She expresses profound regret for the stupidity and vanity of her youth. The world only smiles for the young, she says. Paul hopes she'll smile for her birthday tomorrow, but she does not.

At her birthday party, Oscar gives her the winnings from the race, but her response is dry: it's not enough.

Scene 8 - The Money Gets Spent

The predictions keep coming true, and the money keeps coming. The money gets spent, and Paul keeps riding. All the while the house is getting filled with finery. But it keeps singing. There must be more, but Paul's luck falters as his energy wanes.

Scene 9 - Ava and Paul

Paul begs his rocking horse for more luck for the Derby. Ava decides Paul's been too agitated lately, and the distance between them grows wider. Ava leaves his room and bemoans Paul's lack of understanding. She deserves luxury now and then. Paul robs her of comfort. As if on cue, she hears Paul noisily riding his rocking horse again. While she screams at him to stop, Oscar, Bassett, and the house cheer him on. Paul calls out a name.

Scene 10 - Paul Dies

The last ride has left Paul gravely ill. Oscar and Bassett tell him they bet it all, and they're set for life. Paul asks his mother if she'll finally be happy--finally smile. She does, but as they leave his room to celebrate, Paul hears the house whisper. There must be more.

Paul is desperate, and crawls to his rocking horse for more luck, more money. He tries to ride, fails, makes one final call for his mother, and dies alone.

Cast and Characters



Asitha Tennekoon plays the role of **Paul**, a young man in his late teens or early twenties. Asitha is South Asian and is approximately 5'6" tall.



Lucia Cesaroni plays the role of **Ava**, Paul's mother who is approximately 40 years old. Lucia is approximately 5'5" tall.



Peter McGillivray plays the role of **Bassett**, Paul's caregiver. Bassett has a neatly shaven face and short clipped hair, with eyes that speak of experience rather than innocence. Peter is between the ages of 40 and 50, and is approximately 5'11" tall.



Keith Klassen plays the role of **Oscar**, Paul's uncle. Keith is between the ages of 40 and 60, and is approximately 6'2" tall.



Midori Marsh (Soprano) plays the role of **The House**. Midori is a white/Asian cisgender woman between the ages of 19 and 34, and is approximately 5'5".



Alex Hetherington (Mezzo-Soprano) plays the role of **The House**. Alex is a white Irish-Canadian cisgender woman between the ages of 20 and 30, and is approximately 5'10" tall.



Anika Venkatesh (Tenor) plays the role of **The House**. Anika is a 22-year-old South Asian (Tamil/Bengali) genderqueer person with a stocky/strong build, and is approximately 5'7" tall.



Korin Thomas-Smith (Baritone) plays the role of **The House**. Korin is Black, between the ages of 27 and 32, and is approximately 6'1" tall.

Musicians



Kamna Gupta is the **Music Director and Conductor**. Kamna will be wearing formal blacks.



Stéphane Mayer is the **Pianist and Répétiteur**. Stéphane will be wearing a tuxedo.



Aysel Taghi-Zada is the **First Violinist**. Aysel will be wearing formal blacks.



Tanya Charles Iveniuk is the **Second Violinist**. Tanya will be wearing formal blacks.



Brenna McLane is the **Violist**. Brenna will be wearing formal blacks.



Sybil Shanahan is the **Cellist**. Sybil will be wearing formal blacks.

Set



The set consists of two levels connected by a curved staircase on the right.

On the lower level, which is the stage level, there is a baby grand piano with a bench at centre stage. The piano's lid has been removed. There is a small, round wooden side table to the left of the piano with a crystal sherry glass on it. On the left of the stage is a wooden armchair with an upholstered seat, and another round wooden side table is placed to its left with a crystal sherry decanter on it. Behind the grand piano underneath the upper level is a slightly transparent fabric scrim that has been printed to look like faded and peeling wallpaper. Throughout the show, the members of The House appear faintly lit behind this fabric scrim.

During the show, additional set pieces will be brought onto the stage. The older furniture is replaced with more upscale furnishings, doilies are placed on top of the two side tables, and a large vase with a lush flower bouquet is placed at the bottom of the stairs.

On the right side of the stage beyond the staircase are four wooden chairs with upholstered seats where the musicians are seated throughout the show. Each chair has a music stand in front of it. In front of the musician seats is the conductor stand with a stool. A toy piano sits on a table next to the conductor who plays it occasionally during the show.

The upper and lower levels of the set are separated by black crown molding that is deeply curved so that the middle appears to sag. Directly above the lowest point in the curve is where Paul's rocking horse remains throughout the show. A wooden armchair is placed to the right of the rocking horse. There is a wooden railing along the front of the upper level. Behind the railing there is a sheer white curtain that comes in and out throughout the show.

At the back of the upper level, there is a printed backdrop or cyclorama featuring the image of three large, ornate windows. The backdrop is backlit and changes colour throughout the show to depict day or night, or to emphasize the drama.

Above the upper level hangs a crystal chandelier. Throughout the show, the chandelier slowly lights up, appearing to be powered by Paul's riding of the rocking horse. Two additional, smaller chandeliers are hung above the audience, one on the right and one on the left.

Both levels act as Paul and Ava's house, but the upper level is sometimes used as the stands at the racetrack.

Costumes



Paul starts the show wearing a white long sleeve shirt with white striped boxers and white socks.



Paul puts on a light blue-grey sweater, brown pants, and white and brown sneakers. When he goes to the races, he puts on a burgundy and light brown jacket.



Ava starts the show wearing a white dressing gown with a blue leaf pattern and blue slippers.



Ava changes into a dark blue velvet floor-length gown with a drooping neckline. Sparkly earrings and a necklace are added to complete the look.



Bassett, seen here with Paul, wears a white dress shirt with a beige vest, dark grey pants, brown dress shoes, and a black dress coat. When he goes to the races, he puts on a black cap.



Oscar wears a three-piece dark navy pinstripe suit with a white dress shirt and a beige and brown checkered tie. When he goes to the races, he wears a gray dress coat.



The four members of **The House** are dressed in working-class apparel common in early 20th century England. The garments are in varying shades of grey and black, distressed and covered in streaks of paint. At the races, they wear overcoats and hats to act as spectators.

Get in Touch

If you have any questions or concerns about this access guide or planning your visit to *Rocking Horse Winner*, please reach out!

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Thank you for attending *Rocking Horse Winner*!