

A few weeks ago, I had the chance to experience the musical *Water for Elephants*. The story centers around Jacob Jankowski, a young Polish-American man who, after a life-altering loss, leaves his childhood home behind and impulsively jumps aboard a passing train—only to discover it's part of a struggling traveling circus.

As Jacob's journey unfolds, the elderly Jacob looks back on his younger years as the circus's veterinarian, where he is introduced to a cast of colorful characters. He develops a secret, intense connection with Marlena, the equestrian performer, but their love is complicated by her abusive husband, August, the circus's charismatic but volatile ringmaster. Along the way, Jacob forms bonds with other performers and animals alike, each with their own set of challenges. After Marlena's horse dies from exhaustion, August buys an elephant for her and Jacob to train, marking a turning point for the circus. At the same time, Jacob and Marlena are forced to hide their growing feelings because of August's violent jealousy. Their secret relationship becomes a constant struggle, one that creates tension as they navigate the unpredictable world of the circus.

The best part of the production, in my opinion, was the animal puppetry. The puppets looked realistic and were able to convey emotional storytelling. The skill and attention to detail helped create a strong connection between the animals and the audience, enhancing the musical experience. On the other hand, while the actors did their best, the musical lacked strong, memorable songs. The performances were solid, even though the leads' voices weren't the strongest, but the music didn't do much to support the story. Without impactful songs to drive the emotional depth of the story, it was harder to connect with the characters and the plot. The actual plot of the production felt repetitive, like I'd seen it before—lacking originality.

Overall, I enjoyed the production. The performances were good and the animal puppetry was impressive. However, the story felt repetitive, and the music didn't make much of an impact. While the actors did what they could, the plot didn't offer anything new and the songs didn't help drive the story forward. Despite that, I still had a good time watching the show.