



Review of The Tempest



"The very stuff of summer"

by Avril Silk for remotegoat on 23/07/15



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A beautiful summer's evening in the timeless ruins of Glastonbury Abbey; a scrumptious picnic with convivial company; above all a profoundly intelligent, compassionate performance of one of Shakespeare's best-loved plays. Thank you, Rain or Shine Theatre Company, for your beguiling Shakespearean romance, 'The Tempest'.

As Prospero, James Reynard's powerful magician is moving from arrogant control into the darkness of old age and loss of daughter, magic, Ariel and self-image. Were that all, the play would be bleak indeed. But James' performance showed us the possibility of letting go courageously and becoming ever more human, working for peace and reconciliation. Here was a loving father and a man returning to himself and reality after a voyage to the furthest, wildest shores of his nature.

The relationship between Prospero and Miranda was profound. Pippa Meekings brought wit and fun to a young girl on the edge of womanhood. Falling in love with Ferdinand (Ellis J. Wells) was inevitable and natural. Sometimes young lovers in plays are a pain; happily Pippa and Ellis were love-struck, sweet, believable and delightfully daft. Ellis's considerable achievement was two-fold as his Caliban wrung my heart whilst chilling my soul. There was more than just an idea of a monster here; there were uncomfortable insights into how a child can be disastrously damaged. Thankfully, there were also moments of laugh-out-loud comedy, as when Caliban encountered Anthony Young's splendid Stephano, bursting with self-importance, and Rob Keeves' hapless Trinculo – a study in gormless expressiveness. I have quite a well-honed resistance to Shakespearean clowns, but the actors swept that aside with ingenuity, high jinks and low humour. The four legged beast with two heads was very funny.

Meanwhile, in another part of the island, King Alonso (Jane Lloyd) his brother Sebastian (Anthony Young) and Prospero's usurping brother Antonio (Rob Keeves) add serious weight to the story as the grief-stricken King, played here with tremendous dignity and courage, seeks the son he fears is drowned, unaware that his companions are plotting to kill him. Their thoughts of murder are foiled by the spirit Ariel, (Claire Tucker) as all are led, first astray, then towards Prospero and his dream of reuniting the warring families through the union of Miranda and Ferdinand. Claire's clear-voiced, otherworldly interpretation of the spirit, was intriguing, and her puppet was one of many examples of ingenuity and creativity. Sound effects and masks were used to great effect, conjuring storms one minute, and mischievous spirits the next. I liked Director James Reynard's use of live, rather than pre-recorded, sound.

As the plots unfolded and the characters explored the unnamed island, I was reminded from time to time of TVs 'Lost' – a modern take on castaways.

Rain or Shine are particularly blessed with Producer Jayne Lloyd's flair for costume design, and a cast that can carry off pantaloons. I appreciated all the costumes, from Caliban's disturbing leather helmet to the fantastical robes of Iris and Ceres, although I would have liked more rough magic cast over Prospero's cloak.

The revels may have ended, but the sweet memories linger on.