

## Rain or Shine's *The Tempest* review

★★★★☆

*Magic, mischief and mirth were all part of a mesmerising production of The Tempest, performed by Gloucestershire touring company Rain or Shine in the breathtaking surrounds of Hailes Abbey.*



*The Rain or Shine cast's alfresco performance was a true theatrical treat.*

The sun was smiling on the glorious grounds of Hailes Abbey when hoards of theatre-goers turned out for an alfresco Shakespeare show, armed with picnics, chairs and even makeshift tables in tow.

Settling down among the cheerful crowd with the pleasant tunes of medieval music and the odd clinking of wine glasses to disturb the peace, the setting couldn't have been more serene – or more at odds with the storm which was about to be released onstage.

Taking place within the ruins of the Hailes Abbey cloister – a 'heavenly paradise' originally intended for meditation – it seemed that the historic venue was perfectly fitting for Shakespeare's mythical masterpiece.

The humble stage which was adorned with ornate Elizabethan masks, a handful of props and simple instruments, became spectacular due to the surroundings – the backdrop of greenery and glow of the setting sun created a vision which was rather breathtaking.

From the moment that the seven-strong cast took to the stage, a hush descended among the audience, which remained throughout the entire first act, to be broken only by raucous laughter and spontaneous applause after a particularly humorous scene.

The story – believed by many to be Shakespeare's final play and with conflicting elements of treachery, romance and humour – follows usurped duke and sorcerer Prospero, who uses his magic to control minds and spirits, and casts a terrible tempest in revenge against his enemies.

While Shakespeare plays can be tricky to follow, the Rain or Shine cast mastered the Bard's complex play flawlessly, translating the words through their experienced acting, making the story effortlessly accessible.

And, considering the fact that none of the cast wore microphones, it was even more impressive that each and every word was projected to perfection – so much so that it was amazing they had any voices left by the final scene.

Patriarchal Prospero – played by James Reynard, who also directed the show – excelled in his role as thwarted duke, casting a spell over the audience as over the characters. Particularly impressive was the relationship between the sorcerer and his spirit, Ariel (played by Claire Tucker) which portrayed the power struggle between master and spirit slave expertly.

Equally notable were the actors who adopted dual roles, switching from villainous madmen into comic characters in juxtaposed scenes – a true test of acting ability.

Ellis Wells switched from playing monstrous Caliban to hopeless romantic Ferdinand; Anthony Young altered between a drunken fool and jealous coward; while Rob Keeves changed from cruel, cunning Antonio into jolly jester with stunning speed.

Pippa Meekings was delightful in the role of Miranda, her childish innocence and naivety inviting gales of laughter, while Rain or Shine founder Jayne Lloyd shone as deceptive King Alonso, her very presence governing the stage.

Alongside the stellar acting – which even included some impressive singing and dancing into the mix – it was the thoughtful extras which transformed the play into a spectacular show. Jayne Lloyd's intricate Elizabethan costumes; the simple yet authentic sound effects; and the imaginative technique used to create an invisible yet omnipresent Ariel worked wonderfully.

A delight from start to finish, Rain or Shine's adaptation of *The Tempest* went down a storm and was the perfect way to spend a summer's evening. And as the sun set on Shakespeare's final words – Prospero's pleas for 'indulgence' in the form of applause – the delighted audience most willingly delivered.

See *The Tempest* in Gloucestershire to catch the last few performances of Rain or Shine's 2015 summer tour in the county.

By Kathryn Godfrey

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