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Lost Nation Delivers Magic in “The Tempest”

By Jim Lowe, Staff Writer

MONTPELIER—“The Tempest” is one of William Shakespeare's most delightful mixtures of romance, comedy and magic, and Lost Nation Theater has created a production that is nearly as light as a feather.

Montpelier's professional theater company opened a production Friday of Shakespeare's last great romance at City Hall Arts Center, one that delighted in the Bard's magical wit with a particularly fine cast.

The title refers to the storm Prospero has created to capture his enemies, including his brother Antonio, who has supplanted him as Duke of Milan. Prospero has been banished to an island with his beloved books along with his young daughter Miranda. Among the books is one on magic, and with this magic he is able to control the island and its environment. Among his tools are Ariell, a sprightly fairy he has saved from the island's now-dethroned wicked witch, and the witch's progeny Caliban, whom Prospero keeps as a slave.

Miranda is terribly upset about the storm, thinking the resulting shipwreck will kill all aboard. But Prospero's magic has delivered them to land completely unscathed, and the invisible Ariell has dispersed them about the island.

Most are in small groups, but the young Ferdinand, son of the King of Naples, another of Prospero's enemies, finds himself alone. Wandering about, he comes upon Miranda—and it's love at first sight for both. Of course, Ferdinand is only the third man Miranda has seen since infancy—the others being her father and Caliban. After some wrangling, Prospero makes Ferdinand “earn” his daughter's hand.

Meanwhile, the evil Caliban enlists two drunks from the ship, the jester Trinculo and the butler Stephano, in a plot to kill Prospero and take over the island. Of course, the three are so hilariously incompetent that they can only fumble their way into captivity. In the other group, Antonio begins plotting to overthrow Alonso, King of Naples, but Gonzalo, Prospero's only friend among the shipwrecked, keeps thwarting the plot—with the help of the unknowing Ariell. Before it's over, Prospero brings them all together for the final confrontation. And, of course, it being a comedy, everything ends happily.

“The Tempest” represents some of Shakespeare's lightest and wittiest writing, and Lost Nation Theater's production, directed by Kim Bent, delivers it delightfully. At Thursday's preview, it took a little while for the action to take off, but when it did it was great fun.

Much of the success is due to fine casting. John Alexander has a real presence as Prospero. Although he could have relaxed a little more in the beginning—after all, Prospero is in control—Alexander regally lorded it over his island and proved the cornerstone to the production.

Emily Lyons was a natural as Miranda, seeming genuine in her excitement at discovering a man and love. John Russell's Ferdinand perfectly countered her, with perfect earnestness. (This is not a very interesting part.) And Anna Solloway's Ariell was delightfully light and airy, flitting about, delivering her delicious repartee with an ever-so-light wit. The comic trio was just that. Diomedes Koufteros' Caliban was just the right mix of sardonic wit, evil and pathetic. Evan Alboum was delightfully and wittily pathetic as the jester Trinculo, while David Poirier was beautifully arrogant in the butler Stephano's stupidity. The three were delightfully hilarious together as the play's commedia dell'arte characters. The remainder of the cast was solid. Unlike many of Lost Nation's previous large-cast productions, there were no real weak links. The acting was solid at least, and delightful at best.

The visual magic—so necessary in this play—was largely due to a colorful and imaginative, albeit simple set and lighting by Claiborne Coyle. Colorful period costumes by Milisa Brinton rounded out the magical picture.

Lost Nation Theater is taking delight in “The Tempest.”