

The Tempest

Platform 4 , **Riverfront Newport , October 31, 2009**

Reviewed by Chris Paul

The Tempest, Shakespeare's last play, is lyrically charged and thematically rich. A moody brew of magic, colonialism, sexual frisson, political intrigue, and slapstick humour. As such it has been subject to some radical interpretations over the years- such as Peter Greenaway's remarkable *Prospero's Books*. In keeping with the notion of radical interpretation Platform 4 have generated a work which while clearly deeply indebted to the English bard plays much more like a post-modern psycho-drama than a thoughtful late Elizabethan comedy.

To enjoy this play requires a bit of patience and an abandonment of any precious sentiments you might have as to the sacrosanctity of Shakespeare's exact plot. It is worth this effort however. As Platform 4 have delivered a poignant and wondrous work of intellectual puzzlement and satisfaction. The Tempest is one of Shakespeare's more familiar texts, a staple part of the A-level syllabus for many, and through the multiplication of character in the midst of a bleak and simple set, Platform 4 break out of conventional textual modalities. Or in less abstract terms they bring something very original and new feeling to a tried and tested script.

The plot in this adaption revolves around Ralf Higgins' grizzled Prospero. Who functions as protagonist in chief, narrator, and symbol of the synthesis between author and character. His repressed but well meaning daughter Miranda, Laura Charmichael, also doubles as magically endowed servant spirit Ariel. Her performance as Ariel was utterly sound but maybe subdued. This could well be down to the direction though. The dual subservience of both characters raises feminist concerns that chime as they are merely touched upon. Richard Nutter plays Caliban, Ferdinand, as well as Trinculo and Stefano. We are reminded of the aggression and brutality that sculpts our masculinity and that lives beneath well-bred politeness. Richard Nutter embodies these roles and his vigorous portrayals hinting at the violence and confusion under our skins were arguably the highlight of the show. He certainly delivers one of the most engaging Shakespearian monologues seen by this reviewer. Oddly not a monologue written by Shakespeare himself, at least in this format. This alludes to the savage precision, and intelligence, behind the editing of the script. Directors Simon Plumridge and Catherine Church deserve plaudits.

In total this is The Tempest with the subconscious of the characters yanked to the surface and turned up to the max. This creates a deficit where the actual drama and comedy fall into disuse. Not to worry though, as the brain is kept occupied throughout, and the heart senses a certain loss from which imagination seeps. We are all, it seems to say, the children our muddle and perception. Such stuff as dreams are made of indeed.

This is Shakespeare pared right down, but what is left is startling and beautiful. A ripping yarn it is not. But the theatrical world should continue to make much space and provision for companies that demonstrate such daring sensitivity as Platform 4.