

With his manicured facial hair and distressed leather crown, Steve Hendrickson's Leontes exudes hot, renegade royalty. In Ten Thousand Things' *The Winter's Tale*, he plays the king of Sicilia with convincing, reckless egoism. He locks up his wife, banishes his best friend, and abandons his newborn daughter with nary a bat of the eye. What's more, he looks like a king. I found it disconcerting, then, to recognize a vague resemblance to George W. Bush. Hendrickson doesn't *look* like Bush, per se, but his uncompromising cockiness recalls the president, though Hendrickson is sexy and well-spoken as he struts across the stage to mark his poetic decrees.

The Winter's Tale is a monster of a play. The text swims and dives between tragedy, comedy, and fantasy, each used to illustrate Shakespeare's point about the suffering we inflict on those we love most. From this awesome material, Ten Thousand Things crafts a simple play. The show offers little spectacle: no set, no lights, and few props. A utilitarian cast of six uses inflection and speedy costume changes to create 16 characters (the Guthrie's 1992 production had 21 actors plus 9 extras). Sometimes the actors change costumes in the nick of time, rushing onstage with their Elizabethan collars rumpled and hastily fastened. To create Shakespeare suited for both purists and dabblers, guest director Tracy Young relies on her cast's ability to charge the text with

physicality and meaning. Hendrickson leads in this feat. Over time his gentle smile slowly contorts into the spiteful grimace of a jealous lover. Suspecting his wife Hermione (Marie-Françoise Theodore) of infidelity with his good friend the King of Bohemia (Matt Guidry), he flies into a jealous rage. He comes to his senses only when the queen and the prince (Nathan Christopher) drop dead, leaving him to grieve for eternity.

Sixteen years pass during intermission. When the actors reemerge, long shreds of colorful fabrics hang heavy from raggedy costumes, as if a silly-string battle had broken out in the greenroom. They look dirt-poor, but festive. Matt Guidry hunkers down low to play a paltry thief who sneaks around stealing purses. He stretches his legs in long, silent strides, slinking across stage like the Pink Panther. He's mischievous and adolescent, perpetually on the verge of busting a gut. Such antics cost Guidry an effective performance as the King of Bohemia earlier in the show, but here they serve him well. Along with Kate Eifring, who plays a dim-witted Shepherd's Son, he takes the cast to a comic climax.

Amidst this revelry the Prince of Bohemia falls headlong in love with the long-lost Sicilian

Sexy Beast

Ten Thousand Things strips down a Shakespearean monster

by **Christy Desmith**



You don't win me kingdoms anymore: Marie-Françoise Theodore and Steve Hendrickson in 'The Winter's Tale'

princess. In this role, Aimee Bryant is quite the sight--a gap-toothed pixie bedecked in spring flowers and flowing pink robes. With her benevolent smile, you *want* to believe she possesses the charms Shakespeare bestowed upon her. But sadly, she doesn't. Her performance lacks rhythm and understanding. Poetry is lost in her monotone delivery. Yet, when the princess opens her mouth in song, you grasp--if only for a moment--what might be so mesmerizing about her.

When next we see the King of Sicilia he's clad in black, still mourning his losses. His contrition strips him of any likeness to Bush, making him more akin to, say, Jimmy Carter. The show's most fantastic moment comes shortly thereafter. A crimson drape is pulled back to reveal a statue of the queen looking windswept and lovely as ever. When Leontes beholds it with long, pleading eyes, the love locked inside of him is unleashed, inspiring the others--including the audience--to forgiveness.