

'Tale' is intimate and human

BY DOMINIC P. PAPTOLA

"The Winter's Tale" offers the full sweep of human emotion — love and rage, humor and tragedy, sorrow and redemption. Those emotions radiate off the stage in a dazzlingly immediate production now being staged by Ten Thousand Things Theater Company.

The play usually is classified as one of Shakespeare's comedies, but "A Midsummer Night's Dream" it ain't: A jealous king orders his wife imprisoned and his best friend killed. A child is abandoned, one young prince dies and another turns his back on his father.

It is not Shakespeare's prettiest play, but it toys both with magic and the mortal frailties of real people in real situations. And Ten Thousand Things' production is an intensely human staging, served well by the company's standard staging mode: Audiences sit in a tight circle around the players, costumes and sets are minimal and there's no stage lighting. The result is a raw and intimate exchange.

Guest director Tracy Young and the company take full advantage of that intimacy. Steve Hendrickson, playing the jealous monarch Leontes, treats audience members as if they are part of the court. He confides to them in sotto voce asides and knowing glares as



Marie-Françoise Theodore & Steve Hendrickson

he offers a deeply personal portrait of a flawed king who allows himself to be overrun by his own passions. You can almost hear the titanic emotions cracking within, rending him apart.

In a cagey bit of double casting, Young, who stages this 16-character play with just six actors, also uses Hendrickson in the comedy-relief role of a shepherd. The difference in energy and emotion between the two characters is complete, and Hendrickson's shift from royal to rustic is amazing.

Those kind of excellent, rangy performances abound throughout the cast. Marie-Françoise Theodore gives a deft feminine humanity to Leontes' wife, Hermione, and shifts to an understated, masculine sagacity performing as Leontes' advisor Camillo.

One moment Matt Guidry is the wounded and wronged

king of Bohemia, the next he's a slithery, harmonica-playing pickpocket. Kate Eifrig hectors to great effect as the lady-in-waiting who is Leontes' conscience but she brings a lisp and a risible astigmatism to the role of the bumbling shepherd's son.

Peter Vitale's lush music and soundscape set a variety of moods and scenes instantly and effectively. Vitale is a frequent TTT collaborator, and while his work is always solid, the way his sound scheme — an eclectic combination of percussion, keyboard, harp and made-up stringed instruments — works hand-in-glove with this staging is exceptional.

"The Winter's Tale" offers much of the best of what both Shakespeare and theater can be. Though the staging is small in scale, the manner in which it reaches and the degree to which it touches are epic.

What: Ten Thousand Things Theater Company's production of "The Winter's Tale"

Tickets: \$20

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Capsule: A brilliant, human staging of Shakespeare.